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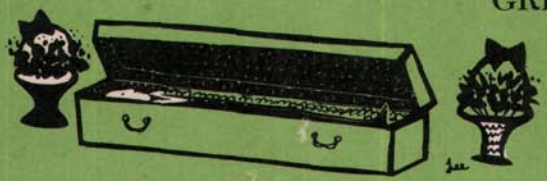

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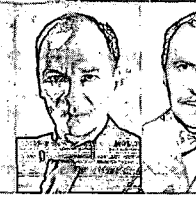

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KING OF THE AISLED FRONTIER

Orson Welles, born May 16, 1915 . . . child prodigy, boy wonder, man marvel . . . and what extraordinary feats will he accomplish in his maturity?

Child prodigy: before his teens Orson Welles appeared in and directed Shakespearian plays . . .

Boy wonder: at sixteen he appeared with the Abbey Players in London; at seventeen he toured in Katherine Cornell's company; at twenty he produced a Negro version of "Macbeth" on Broadway; at twenty-two he was director of the Federal Theatre project in New York; at twenty-three his CBS radio broadcast on October 30, 1938 of H. G. Wells's "The War of the Worlds," starring the boy wonder himself, was projected so realistically and so convincingly that thousands of listeners thought a Martian invasion was actually taking place . . .

When does a boy become a man?

With John Houseman, Mr. Welles founded the Mercury Theatre, and such remarkable productions as "Julius Caesar" in modern dress became Broadway sensations; at twenty-six his "Citizen Kane" — daring, sensitive, off-beat — made motion picture history; at thirty-one he was the dynamic force in the unorthodox musical, "Around the World," based on the famous Jules Verne novel; at thirty-four he spent three months in Rome filming "Othello"; and then "Romeo and Juliet" — "The Barretts of Wimpole Street" — "Heartbreak House" — "Native Son" — "King Lear" — "Moby Dick" — the titles Mr. Welles has been associated with, as actor, producer, director, sound like magical incantations, or the Honor Roll of the theatre, movies, radio, and television . . .

And betweentimes how often he has "threatened" to "go away and write a novel" — why doesn't someone make him do it?

Is it any wonder that all his life, as child, boy, and man, Orson Welles has not only impressed the world but captivated it with his brilliance as a creative iconoclast and as a performer?

He has gone on record as being interested chiefly in experimentation. He admits he has a "good, healthy ego," and delights in hearing his work praised (who doesn't?); but his major preoccupation has always been in "opening up new fields or leaving the old ones better than they were" after Mr. Welles aimed his spear at them.

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And now we offer you a new short story by the Great Man (no iota of disrespect intended) — a charming and ironic little tale about Fifi and the Chilean truffle that almost started a world war. . . . What prodigious exploits are still to come from Orson Welles's exploring, inquisitive mind and from that wondrous voice?

DIPLOMATIC CRISIS; *or,* *Fifi and the Chilean Truffle*

by ORSON WELLES

THERE WAS ONCE A TRUFFLE THAT almost started a world war. Not a "trifle" — *truffle. Tuber Melanosporum* — the black things they put into goose livers. Pigs dig for them, but they almost never get to eat them. Any pig you're likely to find rooting about under an oak tree in the French Province of Perigord is bound to be heavily chaperoned by a keen-eyed farmer with a pocketful of corn. The pig gets the corn, and what the farmer gets for the truffle is a pretty penny (or "*joli sou*").

That Shakespeare among chefs, Brillat-Savarin, referred to the truffle as "the black diamond of the kitchen" — and the little roots are priced accordingly.

In the autumn months optimistic porkers in Northern Italy turn up an outstandingly succulent "white" truffle — actually a lovely, clouded gray. These are grated into silky paper-thin flakes and heaped over the fluffy *risottos* of Milan. But luckily these superb rarities are seasonal, and travel poorly — and thereby hangs my tale.

It happened in Paris and the tragic hero was a Minister in the French Cabinet.

The villain was a truffle.

This truffle was neither black nor white.

"It pretends," said Henri, the Minister's chef, "to be gray. But in point of fact, it is the most abominable green."

The truffle was, moreover, enormous. It was the size of a cantaloupe and it came from Chile, where the father of the Minister's wife had once been *en poste.*

This lady's childhood memories of Chilean truffles were so glamorous that she had pulled strings, and the striking example now under her chef's suspicious eye had been flown all the way from Santiago to Paris in the diplomatic pouch.

His Excellency the Minister had at first mistaken it for some exotic meteorological specimen, while the First Under-Secretary, with a nice

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flair for melodrama, took the precaution of immersing the truffle in a tub of water under the impression that it was a bomb.

Madame, the Minister's wife, lost no time in setting everybody straight. As they well knew, an official dinner of the highest importance was to be given that very evening.

"It is July," she pointed out. "The white truffles of Italy are not to be found, and people eat black truffles every day."

This last, of course, was not strictly accurate, but her husband contented himself with hinting that perhaps his honored guests, being dignitaries from Soviet Russia, would not, during their brief stay in Paris, have already become sated to the point of boredom with French truffles.

"The truffle of Chile," said Madame with finality, "is a pleasing novelty. Inform the chef to use it with the sole." And with this she leaves our story, for the dinner was a stag affair.

"It would not be wise," said the Minister with typical understatement, "to disregard my wife's wishes. And besides, the Russians will not know the difference."

But the chef, a man of vivid temperament, was not to be placated. "Think of the responsibility!" he cried, holding the mossy truffle at arm's length. "Sixteen high-ranking dignitaries of the Soviet Union! Suppose they die?"

"Now, now, Henri, don't make a drama of it."

"Drama?" — first placing the truffle gingerly on the floor, Henri started waving his arms — "Drama? Let me assure Your Excellency that to involve such a vegetable growth in a fish sauce, and to feed it to a group of men schooled in the most direct methods of political action — that is not to make drama, but to encourage tragedy!"

"He is thinking," said the First Under-Secretary in a discreet undertone, "of reprisals."

"Well, now, Henri, don't forget the Ministry is behind you."

"Your Excellency forgets to what I owe my first loyalty."

"Naturally, your professional pride —"

"Not at all. I refer to my position as a member of the Communist Party."

It had slipped the Cabinet Minister's mind that his chef was a Communist. "That does make it awkward, doesn't it?"

"I am already suspected of deviationism," said Henri. "Imagine my fate if so much as one minor gastric upset —"

"Henri, my wife stands behind those truffles."

"She is a brave woman, Your Excellency."

"Now if one of you," said the Minister, "would care to act as a guinea-pig —"

There followed an uneasy silence disturbed only by the asthmatic snufflings of Fifi, an aged Peke.

"It boils down to this," the Minister resumed, staring bleakly out of

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the window, "we have the choice of poisoning the entire Soviet delegation or defying the express wishes of my wife. Either contingency is unthinkable. Fifi! Come back with that!"

The Pekinese had seized upon the truffle, and was worrying it drearily across the parquet floor. The First Under-Secretary jumped forward as Fifi dug her teeth into the vegetable's greenish flesh; but suddenly the First Under-Secretary stopped — the dog was chewing, with evident relish, a generous hunk of the Chilean delicacy. And a terrible look had come into the Minister's eye.

"Long ago," he said, speaking in tones he generally reserved for funerals of the highest pomp, "this elderly and ailing beast should have been put quietly away. Give it another piece of truffle. Should it survive until dinner we are safe to proceed with the menu as planned by my wife. But should Fifi perish — it will be in a good cause: the security of the Republic of France."

By dinner time everyone was breathing easier. Fifi was perhaps the only exception. Not that the truffle hadn't agreed with her, it had; but in the evening hours Fifi's asthma was always a bit troublesome. The Minister let her out to graze in the garden and turned back with a light heart to receive his guests.

A bare hour later the Comrade Vice-Commissar of Soviet Fisheries was already on his feet proposing a toast to peace. Henri had turned the hated truffle into one of his most subtle triumphs, chopping it with shallots and mushrooms into a sauce of white wine thickened with butter and yolks of eggs.

To a man the Russians had mopped their plates with bread and asked for more, and now, over his second glass of an excellent champagne, the Minister was congratulating himself on a diplomatic success when the First Under-Secretary slipped a penciled note under his hand. The message read simply:

"*FIFI IS DEAD.*"

The Minister mumbled his excuses and rushed into the kitchen.

"Call an ambulance!" he cried. "If the Russians die here in the Ministry, it will bring down the Government!"

His hand froze on the telephone. One ambulance would scarcely be adequate: there were sixteen in the delegation. The vision of sixteen ambulances, each bearing its Soviet diplomat, screaming and clanging out of the Quai d'Orsay, was quickly replaced with a mental tableau of sixteen distinguished corpses in sixteen hearses surging endlessly down the Champs Elysées in what would certainly be the most well-attended funeral in history. Every Communist in Europe would march in that procession; there would be a general strike, and then —

In the dining hall another Comrade Commissar could be heard proposing another toast. "I give you," he said, "the French Revolution."

"That," thought the Minister, "is

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precisely what we're going to get." With sixteen honored guests of the Republic struck down at an official dinner in cold blood, revolution was only the beginning — this was war!

Dessert was just about to be served when a trustworthy doctor, under the strictest oath of secrecy, was smuggled into the Ministry and put to work with Henri in the kitchen. There are, it seems, only two effective antidotes for truffle poisoning, and it was felt that neither of them was sufficiently tasteless to risk introducing in the "Bombe Surprise." Obviously the antidotes would have to be surreptitiously administered and if world peace was to be preserved it could only be with the coffee.

"Turkish coffee," the First Under-Secretary urged, "Café Diable — laced with heavy spirits. Henri must arrange it."

The chef, mindful of his own responsibilities as a good Communist, labored mightily.

"Try some tabasco," suggested the Minister, "or a bit of curry powder."

"Your Excellency," said Henri, spitting out a spoonful of the brew, "at one period of the Occupation I was implicated in a pâté of very young kittens. One has one's resources, but they are now exhausted: the effluvia of the clinic persists. Send for the stomach pumps and the priests — I know my limitations!" And here the good man burst into tears of despair.

At this black moment there entered the Third Under-Secretary. He knew nothing of the present diplomatic contretemps, for his rank was not such as to admit him to the banquet. "I have been speaking to Madame," he said, "on the phone. She was most upset over the news about Fifi —"

The Minister cut him off with an impatient gesture. "We are *all* upset," he said. "Indeed, we've felt the loss most keenly."

"Madame asks me to request that you fire the assistant gardener."

"This is hardly the moment for domestic trivialities. My God, man, we're on the brink of —"

"But the gardener left the gate open, and you know how Fifi always *would* run after cars —"

The Minister seized the Third Under-Secretary by the lapel of his coat, a lapel which will shortly be brightened with the rosette of the Legion of Honor.

"You mean —?" asked the Minister.

"Yes, the poor old thing tried it just once too often. A big delivery truck. Death was instantaneous. It was very sad."

NEXT MONTH . . .

Another Woolrich whizbang —

CORNELL WOOLRICH's *The Ice-Pick Murders*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **PAUL W. FAIRMAN**

TITLE: ***The Hills Cried Murder***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Sheriff Sam Davis

LOCALE: Hudson valley — 70 miles from New York

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *In Breen County secret vices were not so much unknown as not talked about, and fifteen years of residence was like a weekend elsewhere. So Sheriff Sam Davis was only an upstart intruder — but one with a sensitivity for hidden evil.*

THE BODY LAY ACROSS A GROWN-over path between the Corner House and Swan Lake on the south end of the Durber place. When Sam Davis finally got there, his legs were weary from the 30 minutes of hard going. He dropped to one knee, pushed the grass back, and said, "It's Patience Durber, all right."

The two youngsters peered large-eyed over his shoulder. The eldest said, "That's just how we found her, Sheriff, layin' like that. What was she doin' out here in her nightgown, anyhow?"

Sam got to his feet, his knee cracking sharply. "It's not a nightgown, son. A kind of bathrobe women wear." He hoped fervently that Patience's death had been a natural one as he turned and peered back through the underbrush and overhang that had long since claimed these deserted woodlands. A murder would be bad for Breen County — more so than for the counties surrounding it, where denser populations tended to impersonalize violence. Here in Breen, with its absence of urban centers, the people were different. They had a deeper knowledge of each other, springing from long and close association. Secret vices were not so much secret as not talked about. And even though the Durber sisters had kept strictly to themselves, a murder would demand the incisive questioning that Sam shrank from as being almost indecent.

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Patience lay face down, huddled, pathetic, not right for a Durber; not as Breen County would remember her — riding the narrow country roads in that outlandish red-wheeled buggy with her sister Deborah and a younger, distant relative, Linda Scott. A real Currier and Ives, that rig: the sorrels beautifully matched, the ladies riding primly, Deborah with her head high, her back straight — and usually with three or four cars crawling along behind waiting for a chance to pass. The term *willful* was always used to describe Deborah, but it was used tactfully. Sam always likened her in his mind to the rocks that held these New York State hills together, that made them eternal.

He casually tousled the unkempt head of the younger urchin. "You kids know this section pretty well, don't you?"

"Oh, sure. We go every place."

"Even to Swan Lake," the other said, "where the Durbites stayed and the old murder was."

The old murder, Sam thought. A scandal twenty years old, but leave it to kids to keep such memories bright. "The lake's about a half mile farther on, isn't it?"

The boy pointed. "Uh-huh. Right through there. You come to the grave first. It ain't far."

"I see. Now I want you kids to cut over Bald Hill to the tavern in Stormtown. Tell Syl Kraft to call Doc Hayes. Wait there and bring Doc back with you."

The ten-year-old was confused. "What's she need a doctor for? She's dead, ain't she?"

"Doc's the coroner. He's got to see her." Sam watched them vanish into the underbrush. Hill kids. Always from large, impoverished families; but sharp and hardy as young muskrats.

Alone, he knelt again and raised Patience gently. He was relieved to find no sign of a wound and he lowered the body carefully, although he could hardly visualize old Doc Hayes divining anything pertinent from its original position. There would be at least a forty-five-minute wait. He pushed off through the underbrush, thinking how efficiently a thing like this would be handled down in Westchester County, or up in Dutchess with uniformed law coming out of Poughkeepsie. Sam's uniform was dungarees, high boots, a windbreaker; and New York City only seventy miles away.

He came to the grave in less than five minutes. It stood in an open glade, the tombstone just visible above a thick growth of milkweed and burdock. Strange, Sam thought, that a man would choose to be buried in such a lonely place. But Isaiah Durber had been a strange man. Then, too, the choice might not have been his. Sam pushed away the milkweed stalks and read the inscription:

Isaiah Durber
1870–1932
Husband of Patricia
Father of Deborah and Patience
He Heard the Voice of the Lord

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There was sly humor in that last line as applied to Isaiah, and Sam smiled faintly, wondering if the author had missed it.

He left the grave and pushed on. The going got even rougher as the forest strove to defend the prize it had snatched from the proud Durbers. Finally Sam breasted a low swell and stood at the portals of Swan Lake.

Once a haughty, flaunting estate, there was now a crouching sullenness about the place. Sam had a sensitivity for such things and the mood struck him sharply: the faint aroma of former grandeur, even though the smell of decay hung like a drooping plume over the blurred and blackened buildings. The lake had shrunk to a puddle. The lawns were now jungle.

Sam wiped his brow and thought of vanished years, of events half-forgotten. The Durbites. They had come to Swan Lake in the late twenties to await the end of the world. All this had been before Sam's arrival in Breen County, but he knew Isaiah had been well into his fifties when a premonition of approaching doom caused him to send forth a call to which some four hundred gullible souls responded. They dressed themselves in white sheets and knelt one evening on the broad lawns to accept their flaming fate. They knelt all night, then got up and left, and Isaiah's reputation as a prophet had been shattered by the rising sun.

Sam went down the slope and began checking the buildings. A ten-minute inspection satisfied him. No one had been here in years. He started back, pausing at the edge of the lake to remember Isaiah's second elevation into notoriety. After the Durbite fiasco he had gone into deep seclusion, but two years later he emerged to confess killing one of Patience's suitors with a shotgun. Sam was hazy as to details. There had been a speedy trial, he believed. At any rate, Isaiah went to prison and died there a year later.

And now Patience also lay dead in the wilderness. A star-crossed family, the Durbers. Sam looked at his watch and shook off the spell of Swan Lake as he hurried back over the path he had broken.

Doc Hayes had already arrived. As Sam got there, the senior urchin greeted him in triumph, holding up an ancient shotgun. "Look at this, Sheriff! It was me that found it! There in them weeds!"

"He stumbled over it," the younger one said enviously.

Doc Hayes, a fat, balding little bustler, rose from his duties as coroner. "Where you been, Sam? Tracking the killer?"

"Circulating a little. What's the verdict?"

"You got no worries. Patience's heart just gave out."

"A little odd, isn't it?"

"Why? She was pushing fifty and was never too rugged. Not like her sister. Give that Debbie horns, she'd be a bull."

"I mean so far from the house."

Doc was fussing with his bag, trying

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to keep the stethoscope from popping out so he could close it. "Maybe she felt it coming on, got panicky, and rushed out looking for air to breathe."

"What about the shotgun?"

"What about it? Nobody used it on Patience. It obviously hasn't been fired for years, so let's not start hunting spooks, Sam." Doc Hayes dusted off his knees. "I've got a couple of boys on the way with a stretcher. Did you notify Deborah?"

"Not yet. Guess I'd better go on ahead and tell her."

"You won't need smelling salts. She isn't the type."

There was a more direct route to the Corner House than the one Sam took. The trail Patience had broken was straight and easily followed for a quarter of a mile, but from that point it meandered intriguingly; and, as Sam backtracked, he found himself going in all directions until he was brought, finally, into the front yard of the Corner House.

It was a rock-solid structure. White with green trim, it had many staring windows and an air of splendid isolation. Isaiah had built it the year after the Durbites disbanded and had moved in immediately, leaving Swan Lake to the mercy of the forest as though in punishment for his betrayal.

Sam climbed the front steps and stood the shotgun against the wall before ringing an old-fashioned bell set in the center of the door. A pale, beautiful girl of perhaps fifteen answered. She had arresting, oval eyes in a quiet, oddly set face. Sam took off his hat. "My name is Davis. I'm the sheriff. We've never met but I know your name. You're Linda Scott, aren't you?"

She nodded gravely. "Did you find —"

"We found her."

Linda's lack of facial expression was a mask which did not quite hide the shock that lay behind. When she spoke, it was in a faraway voice — as though to refresh her own memory rather than to enlighten Sam. "Aunt Patience was in the attic. She came down with a book in her hand — a very small book — and her eyes were — awful. She didn't even see me on the landing. She went downstairs. Then there was — screaming —"

"I'd like to see Miss Deborah if I may."

This startled the girl from her reverie. "Oh, yes. Please come in."

She led him to a small, low-ceilinged room that struck him as having no place in this day and age. Cluttered and stifling, it belonged to a time when men took pride in a pair of fine horses; when Teddy Roosevelt was busting the trusts; when gentlemen tipped high hats to promenading ladies in the park on Sunday afternoons. A repulsive room, Sam thought.

It was occupied by a woman in a fan-backed chair, who appeared to belong in that she, too, was repulsive. Everything about her was big: the feet in the high-buttoned black shoes,

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the hands lying like small hams in her lap, the massive, imperious face.

Sam went in, noting that the girl did not enter. She stood in the doorway with a quiet, submissive air — with something even more, that Sam could not define but did not like. Sam said, "Good morning, Deborah." The woman looked past him and said, "You may come in, Linda," whereupon the girl walked to the fan-back chair and stood waiting. Like a well-trained dog, Sam thought. "You may sit down — there on the sofa," Deborah said. Linda walked over and sat down, and only then was Sam's presence acknowledged. "Did you find my sister?"

He had been wondering how to put it. Straight, he decided. "Yes. About an hour ago. We found her a short distance this side of your old place, at the other end of the farm. She was dead."

There was no movement in the room except Linda's hands rising to her mouth. Deborah's great head turned slowly. Her eyes settled on Linda with the cruel gentleness of a hawk alighting on a tree branch. The hands went back where they belonged.

"Doc Hayes said it was probably heart failure. Death came quickly, I think. No prolonged pain."

Sam realized he was doing all the talking. He studied Deborah, probing for some reaction. But there was no grief, no surprise. Relief perhaps? He couldn't tell. Her face reflected nothing but a stony aloofness.

Linda's face did not change either, but there was something more unnatural about her stiffness. It rasped against Sam's nerves. Was she waiting for permission to cry?

Sam glanced at his watch. "I got your call about eight this morning. I believe you said Patience left the house very early."

"You are mistaken. I said we *missed* her early this morning — when she did not come down to breakfast. I called you immediately."

"Then you don't know exactly when she left?"

Deborah's eyes were two gray jewels in a hard face. "How long had she been dead when you found her?"

"Seven or eight hours, I'd say. Doc might put it closer."

"Then it follows that she must have left sometime before one o'clock."

He was being chided rather than answered, but he made no comment. His gaze had moved upward to a vacant spot over the fireplace. A rifle or shotgun had rested there on two supporting pegs. Its pattern was light against the darkened wallpaper around it. Strange. Nothing could be more out of place in this room than a mounted weapon. "Did you know Patience had a shotgun with her?"

For a brief moment he was in command as Deborah looked at the empty space. "The shotgun *is* gone, isn't it? I hadn't noticed."

"Why do you suppose Patience took it?"

"Not having known of her departure, I can't say."

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"Then you feel it had nothing to do with the incident of the small book?"

This surprised Deborah, but she seemed mildly amused as she said, "I know of no such book." Then her eyes went again to Linda's face in the same hawklike manner and drained it of its last trace of color.

Sam arose from his chair. He felt like a man attacking a granite boulder with bare hands. Lacking an ax, you couldn't chip even the time of day from this rock of a woman. He wondered where he could find an ax. He said, "There's nothing more I can do — at the moment — so I'll run along."

The huge head tilted in approval, but Deborah gave no sign of triumph. Evidently victory over so negligible an opponent justified none. "Thank you for your services, and — Sheriff —"

"Yes?"

"You aren't a native of Breen County, are you?"

"Not in the strict sense. I've lived here about fifteen years."

Deborah sat silent, her expression saying many things; saying that Breen was made up of hills and forests a returning Mohican would have found unchanged; that Sybil Ludington, of Revolutionary War fame, had ridden its night roads assembling her father's regiment; that Uncle Dan'l Drew had driven his cows to market down this Harlem Valley while plotting ways to hornswoggle old Corneel Vanderbilt out of a million or two; that living fifteen years in Breen County was about the equivalent to a weekend visit elsewhere; and that even a Sheriff's badge did not give an upstart outlander permission to snoop. Her expression laid it on the line as she said, "I was born here. So was Doc Hayes. So were most of us. We resist disturbing influences."

Sam walked past Linda's white face and out onto the porch where he picked up the shotgun and went to his car. The gun would be needed at the inquest, but he knew that so long as Patience's death had been natural and the weapon had not been fired, it would go quietly back on the wall over the fireplace. This was a gun Breen County would prefer to forget.

After leaving the Corner House, Sam drove to the Hudson River and crossed over on the ferry, coming finally to Beldon, where the history of the Durber murder was to be found in dusty court records. It took no more than an hour to check the details, after which he returned to Oakton in Breen County, where his office was located, and found Jack Lame Eagle hunkered down near the highway intersection. Sam said, "Get out of those feathers and come with me, Jack."

"Is there a buck in it?"

"Could be."

"Hear Patience Durber snatched by Great Spirit."

"She's dead."

"That's what I said." Jack Lame Eagle claimed to be a Mohawk Indian with the blood of noble ancestors

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sluicing through his veins. However, he was considered by all to be a hook-nosed opportunist with an eye for showmanship. In summer, he donned feathered regalia and cadged hand-outs from passing tourists. In winter, he wore an odorous red shirt and dungarees and picked a living where he could. But he was a woodsman regardless.

He parked his elaborate headdress in the County Clerk's office and climbed into the car. "What's the caper?"

"I want you to untangle a trail."

"Hot work."

"Sorry I can't buy you a beer," Sam grinned. "The law."

This was a cross Jack had to carry as a result of his outrageous masquerade. It was illegal to give Indians liquor. Jack said, "Nuts!"

"Do you remember the old Durber murder?" Sam asked.

"Sure. Young buck named Williams rub noses with Patience Durber —Debbie, too. Old man say he takum shotgun bustum young buck wide open. Smearum around plenty."

"Isaiah was a pretty tough cookie?"

"Crazy goof. Big loudmouth till cult go haywire. Then shut up. Go bats. Build new house. Get sore at Almighty for doublecross. Stop living. No car. No electricity. Use lamps. Horses. Same like Debbie do now."

"The trial must have caused quite a stir around here."

Jack shrugged. "Not much trial. Him confess. Haulum off 'cross river. Jug um. One year — poof! Off to big pasture in sky — or is that cowpoke talk?"

"And now I guess nobody cares about Isaiah one way or the other."

"Not this little Indian, anyhow."

"I'd like to have met him. I've always been attracted by characters." Sam gave Jack Lame Eagle a sidelong glance.

The latter said, "Okay, so Durber had his racket — I got mine. Where's this trail you were talking about?"

Sam invaded the Durber place just beyond sight of the Corner House and watched the pseudo-Indian sniff through the underbrush. Until Jack straightened and pointed to the ground. "Squaw track."

"Patience," Sam said.

"Two squaws. Big Foot. Little Foot. Man, could I use a beer!"

"Walking together?"

"Hell, no. Big Foot run. Maybe Little Foot chase. Kind of hard to figure out. Little Foot circle like hungry deer in snowstorm. Then head straight downwind."

"That's about what I thought," Sam said. "Just wanted a check from an expert."

"Then let us get the hell back to town. There may still be a sucker or two at the intersection."

It had been a long day and dusk was falling as Sam dropped Jack Lame Eagle off. Sam considered. Myra would have supper ready, but she was a good wife — long-suffering — and would not expect him until he arrived. So he went to the office and

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did a few inconsequential things — thus demonstrating his reluctance for the task ahead. Then he got into the car and headed for the Corner House.

As he drove, he pondered the wisdom of making contact with the State Police. Would a smartly uniformed State Trooper add dignity to his visit? Help in any way? He decided not and drove on, somehow expecting a red-coated Britisher to pop into the road at any moment and accuse him of being a rebel.

The Corner House was marked by yellow lamplight in the windows of the lower floor. Upstairs, a single window glowed. Maybe Patience was there — poor, tormented Patience, finally at rest. Later, the neighbors and village folk would come to pay their respects, but on this first night the Corner House mourned privately.

Sam rang the bell. A light bloomed and a slim figure came forward bearing a lamp. Linda, of course, but she could have been Patience out of yesterday.

Deborah still sat in the fan-back chair but a touch had been added — a great black cat in her lap, its back bending under every stroke of her heavy hand. Deborah tossed the cat on the floor and said, "Run along, Neptune. Good evening, Sheriff."

Without being invited, Sam took a chair opposite where she sat so supremely confident of her position — rooted deep in the soil of her forebears across which outlanders merely came and went. "There are a few things I want to say."

She sneered at him. "Important things?"

"To me — yes. I found out why Patience had the gun."

"I'd be happy to know."

"To kill you with. You were running for your life and she was chasing you."

"Now Sheriff — really —"

"I figure it this way. Patience discovered something last night — a small book. Perhaps it contained —"

"Sheriff, you misunderstood Linda. If you question her again, you'll find she knows nothing of Patience's reason for —"

"I don't doubt that you've arranged for Linda to forget, but I'm glad you admit Patience had a reason. I didn't expect you to."

"Sheriff Davis! My sister was —"

Sam held up a hand. "Let's not waste time. The details of last night's tragedy aren't very important, really, because nothing will ever be done about them. I followed through on that phase because I felt it my duty as sheriff. Let's just say that Patience learned something last night that evidently drove her temporarily out of her mind. After you ran from her and evaded her, she started toward her father's grave — possibly to ask his forgiveness for years of misplaced hatred. But that's not important either."

Deborah was perplexed. "I don't understand what you're driving at."

"A little time. You will. And now we come to a question: What terrible truth did Patience learn?"

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Deborah's face — highlighted and shadowed by the lamp at her elbow — made Sam think of a wintry plain with a cold wind blowing over it. The black cat scudded in, low-bellied, and jumped again into her lap. Sam felt a touch of panic. Was he playing the fool? Should he have stuck to the things they had hired him for? Chasing poachers off posted property? Investigating pilfered tool sheds?

Deborah said, "I'm sure Doctor Hayes won't think it necessary to check so exhaustively into a natural death."

"What you're really saying is that you have money and power and you'll see me out of office come next election. But that won't be for two years, so let's get back to it."

"Back to what?"

"The reason for Patience's outburst. I think she finally discovered what everyone in Breen County has known for years — that you killed her lover and your father took the blame."

There was a nerve-splitting squawk as Deborah's hand closed with strangling force around the cat's throat and the black beast hurtled from the room. But Deborah's eyes held tight to Sam's face.

He said, "I've heard it more than once, so today — for reasons of my own — I went over to Beldon and checked."

"You're contemptible!"

"I've no doubt, but at the risk of boring you, I'll refresh your memory with a few details. One night Billy Wilson, who had a reputation for playing the field, met Patience over on Swan Lake. A shotgun blast from the darkness killed him instantly. Patience fled home and found her father here and he called the sheriff — from this house. Now, he didn't say, *I have just killed a man.* He said, *There has been a murder at Swan Lake.* The variation is a minor point, but significant because when the sheriff got here twenty minutes later, your father had his confession all ready. Possibly he had talked to you in the meantime."

There was murder in Deborah's eyes. Anger made her lips tremble, but she said nothing.

"Isaiah was probably a little mad," Sam went on. "It could follow in a man who would build a brand-new house just to get away from the scene of a humiliation; but he must also have been a complete extrovert — hardly a person who would murder from the darkness and run home without showing his face. But a jealous, vengeful woman might kill that way — a sadistic, brutal woman, who might also have mounted the shotgun over the fireplace in place of Billy's head and gloated over it while she spent her declining years breaking the spirit of a weak younger sister, making her sister's life a living hell."

The perspiration on Sam's forehead came from his dread of failing. Deborah Durber could break him and he was no longer a young man. He might find the going hard. He said, "So the case of the whisperers

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isn't entirely without foundation. Nothing a trained jurist would click his heels over, but it has its points — points easily obscured at the trial because no one was trying very hard to bring them out."

"Sheriff Davis, do you think I killed Billy Wilson?"

"I don't know. Twelve good men would have to decide that after a grand jury gave them permission. It would be very hard to get any action on a twenty-year-old murder — especially with a confession and a conviction barring the way."

"Then what in God's name are you doing here? What do you want?"

"That girl, Linda. I think she's been with you about five years — since her parents were killed." Deborah neither spoke nor moved. Sam took a deep breath. "I want her out of this house. That's the only thing I'm after. I want her out of this house — *now!*"

Silence echoed like a clarion bell. It bounced off the walls and boomed against Sam's ears. Then he went on — his quiet, stubborn, patient voice . . . "So I'm not sitting in judgment over you, Deborah. All I know is that your kind lives for no purpose but to rule and wreck, to beat down and dominate. Cruelty and debasement are your food and drink. It's too late for Patience, but I want Linda out of here even if she has to go to an orphanage."

Veins stood out on Deborah's brow — long, twisting veins. "Why, you cheap game warden! You come here without a shred of evidence and try to tell me how to run my life!"

"That depends on what you consider evidence. Anyhow, this is how it stands. Linda leaves this house or I'll walk out of that door and yell miscarriage of justice until hell won't have it. I don't say I'll relish the prospect, but I'll make a kind of crusade out of it because if it's important to release a million people from bondage, it's just as important to rescue one lonely frightened girl."

Deborah had difficulty in understanding or believing this quiet, rather helpless-looking little man. "I think you've gone out of your mind! To think you can —"

"I'm not arguing with you, I'm just telling you. Give me what I want or I'll sound off until the hills cry murder. I'll dig the whisperers out from under their rocks and make them talk out loud. I'll go down to New York and find a reporter with an ear for details and some Sunday supplement space to fill —"

"Stop it, damn you! Stop it!"

"In short, I'll do my level best to get you indicted for that old murder, Deborah — and I just might succeed."

He got up from his chair and turned away. He was through now. He had nothing in his mind beyond this moment. He'd shot his bolt and now she would start throwing her thunder and lightning . . .

"I can send Linda to relatives in San Diego."

He heard the words as from a long

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way off and he wished she would repeat them because so sudden a surrender had not been in his calculations. A simple confession. Indirect, of course — but all he could expect, all he had asked for.

But was it a confession? Maybe not. Maybe just the final capitulation of a tired old monster. He would never know for sure. He stood where he was, glad Deborah could not see his face, knowing suddenly it had had to be this way — a quick victory or none at all. Because there was a certain type of rock in these hills — formidable-looking — but when you swung the sledge it gave a dull ring and fell away into dust and shale. Rotten stone. But it looked all right — like strong, solid rock.

He left the room and went upstairs and found Linda sitting in her bedroom. She appeared to be awaiting the worst. He said, "Get a few things together, honey. You're going to stay at my house tonight. I probably won't be much company, but you'll like my wife, Myra. She's funny and fat and she might make you laugh almost anytime."

As they passed the parlor downstairs, Sam stopped and said, "Linda wants to say goodbye." But Deborah neither spoke nor moved and Sam regarded her in silence. He knew what would happen now. The red-wheeled buggy would roll no more, and with little reason left to go on living, Deborah would sit for a while and before long she would die and the unhappy Durbers would be finished.

Out in the car, with Linda a mousy shadow beside him, things were better. He thought of Isaiah. Breen County had decided that if a man wanted to shoulder his daughter's crime and go to jail, it was all right with them. But Isaiah was under the milkweed and the burdock and couldn't care much one way or the other.

The people of Breen . . . Perhaps the sheriff had been wrong about them. Were they really so different? They had turned their faces away from an evil — but wasn't that a universal custom? Look not upon unpleasantness and perhaps it will go away.

He turned to Linda. "Do you like picnics, honey?"

"I — I don't know. I —"

"Don't worry. You'll have plenty of time to find out."

He summed up the day. It had been a good one.

Next month . . . a new Story Title Contest — $1,000 in prizes!

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **NEDRA TYRE**

TITLE: ***Tour de couleur***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Southern United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *This strange and disturbing tale is divided into five parts, and we call your attention, at the outset, to the curious order in which the parts are presented . . . altogether a strange and disturbing tour de force . . .*

Part Four

THERE WERE ONLY A FEW MINUTES between planes for the interview with Dr. Robert Meadows, the eminent anthropologist, and John Anderson had in his hand a number of questions he intended to ask the famous scientist.

As an editor and reporter, Anderson was analytical as well as inquisitive about people and public affairs. He was also self-analytical, and he glanced down his list of questions and noticed there was none relating to color; and yet he knew he would ask about color. His question would be vague — he never seemed to be able to make it specific; but he had been acutely — sometimes it seemed to him passionately — interested in color ever since a certain event had occurred five years before. Whenever a person he talked with professionally appeared likely to have information about color, Anderson finally veered to that subject; but when he got there he found himself faltering and uncertain.

He had talked about color with people in all trades and careers; some of them were friends, some were acquaintances, most of them were illustrious strangers whom he, as associate editor of the city's leading newspaper, had interviewed.

A great modern painter had once told him something of the esthetics of color; a psychologist who might some day rank just below Freud had explained how yellow was the color of

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madness, and green that of perversion; a historian had discussed the sumptuary laws of medieval times when certain colors, particularly purple, were restricted to use by royalty; semanticists had rambled on about color expressing emotion and how the same word could be used in contradictory senses — for instance, a blue mood in contrast with a blue sky, and how red was at once the color of violence and of power.

Persons in publishing and editing had cited examples of powerful written treatments of color: Proust's use of pink; Keats's melodic employment of color, particularly in *The Eve of St. Agnes*. There was a special force to Meier-Graefe's description of Van Gogh's death — when all the colors of Van Gogh's palette came to pay him obeisance on his deathbed. Through the character of Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*, George Eliot had described the compelling emotional quality of color: *It is strange how deeply colors seem to penetrate one, like scent. I suppose that is the reason why gems are used as spiritual emblems in the Revelation of St. John.* And one author had insisted that the most effective use of color in all literature was in Edgar Allan Poe's passage describing the variously hued apartments in *The Masque of the Red Death*.

These tidbits of knowledge were interesting but they made Anderson chafe. Provocative too, they made him yearn even more for the answer he needed but never got — because somehow he did not know the exact question he should ask. All this unrelated trivia simply widened the distance between the question he could not phrase and the unknown answer he longed for . . .

Dr. Meadows impressed Anderson at once with his vast fund of information, with the quiet way in which he revealed his knowledge, and with his obvious gratitude for the interest that Anderson showed in anthropology.

It was something that the anthropologist said about burial customs that set Anderson's mind to recalling details of the death of the young woman, although thoughts of her death were always easily summoned. She had been in her grave for five years now. Her husband had remarried. His second wife had been a friend of the first wife; the second wife was an interior decorator whose international reputation almost matched that of her husband as a financier.

But Anderson realized he must not let his mind gambol, though it was reassuring to see that even with his thoughts elsewhere he had still been able to take down in his own brand of shorthand what the social scientist was saying.

"Will you explain simply," Anderson said, "so that I can make it clear to our readers, the difference between cultural and physical anthropology?"

The anthropologist talked precisely and Anderson's hand raced across his notebook, but his mind was a dog that would not let go of a bone; his mind wanted to dismiss anthropology and

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dwell only on color . . . and the girl's death.

Part Two

Anderson had been on the city desk then and had taken the call when it came in. A young woman had just died suddenly. No autopsy had yet been done — her body was still where her husband had found it in the living room. The story would have been buried deep in the back pages except for the fact that the husband was rich and rising phenomenally as a banker and belonged to a prominent old family. There was pathos and reader interest too in the fact that the young wife had just returned to her newly redecorated home — she had been away to visit her ill mother on the West Coast; her return had been expected, but the exact time of her arrival had not been known, and even as she died her husband and the decorator had been at work in another part of the house, busy with last-minute details to make a triumphant welcome for the young wife. She had died alone; she had entered the house and evidently the joy of her homecoming had been too overpowering, and she had died almost instantly.

Anderson had gone to the house of death and had watched the police and the men from the city hospital do their precise duties in the impressive Georgian mansion. As he observed them he had not been able to describe what he felt; it was uncanny and pervasive, a feeling that willful violence might be abroad; as he looked into the astonished face of the husband and the strikingly handsome face of the woman who stood beside him, Anderson sensed mystery and evil; but there was nothing he could do, no accusation he could make.

Back at the paper he had sat waiting, impatient, irritable until the autopsy was completed and the medical report had become available; his voice was angry when he told the medical examiner he didn't believe the girl had died simply from a heart attack; he had said something wild and incoherent about the walls and the rugs, and the medical examiner had suggested that Anderson must have nipped a bit too freely from some bottle in his desk drawer while he waited for the medical report.

Once Anderson's copy was filed he left the office to go to his apartment, but he had stood outside the newspaper building and had looked up at the stars as if in blazing cuneiform they might spell out the answer he wanted; he stood there in the wind and the cold while the night stumbled hesitantly and unwillingly into morning; and he thought of the girl so new to death, her body being prepared even then for the ceremony of burial. Clouds gathered and thickened, rain fell; his slow steps pushed through the hard, challenging rain and he longed for it to wash away his suspicion and uncertainty.

Part Three

The chapel was a small, gracious place; its cheerful atmosphere mini-

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mized death, treating it as if it were only a minor hazard in life's progress.

John Anderson had gone there early the next morning; he had not known why — certainly he did not plan to stay for the funeral service. A mortuary assistant wearing a reassuring smile and morning clothes had welcomed him as if to a reception and had led him to the place where the dead girl lay.

Anderson looked down upon her and was stunned by what he saw.

She was beautiful in death, lovely enough to evoke the fair ladies of legend: Elaine and Iseult, Deirdre and the bride in *The Song of Songs.* The soft gray of the coffin, the delicate pink of its lining fondled her; the faint orchid of the chiffon robe lay on her like a caress and made a lyric of color, obliterating the threnodic black of death's dominion; her tiny, fragile hands encircled the blue and pink fragrance of a bouquet of forget-me-nots and sweetheart roses; every tone, every shade, every color near her or touching her elaborated — with the skill of a generous but unflattering portraitist — the soft pastel blonde beauty of the dead girl.

And then Anderson was not alone; two other watchers were there — he had not noticed when they had joined him. They paid no attention to him, but they were mourners, he knew that; and then he recognized them as the two persons in the house the night before — the girl's husband and the decorator. In a strange, wild, fantastic way they seemed to complete the composition in the chapel: the gentle colors of everything about the dead girl were made into a whole picture by those two in their colorless, shocked silence of grief — the handsome man in his oxford-gray suit, the young woman in her black coat and black hat with her masklike face that indicated sorrow so much more than features distorted by weeping.

As Anderson left the chapel he was possessed by a macabre feeling that somehow color had been used beyond the borders of art and in a way that approached diabolism.

Part One

Mary stood looking at the stately, impressive Georgian house; her bags were clustered around her on the lawn — she had refused the taxi driver's offer to take them to the entrance; and she thought, in the soaring peace of fulfillment, that her true marriage was just beginning — the months before were simply a happy prologue. As she speculated on the future, the bags at her feet might have been her children gathered around her, or even her grandchildren — it was a house that had lasted many generations and would last generations more, a place of permanence and pleasure and contentment.

She noticed that the front of the house was dark but from somewhere in the back there seemed to be a light; perhaps Arnold was there having a snack or doing some last-minute chore to make the house ready for her; he had not known when to ex-

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pect her — the course of her mother's illness had been unpredictable — a physical seesaw, now better, then worse; but at last her mother had recovered and the doctor had said Mary might leave. The joy at this moment, she thought, may be greater than when I see my husband — emotion and elation will take over then.

The capricious wind descended once more — its strength made even her heavy suitcases sway; the name plates attached to their handles chattered against the locks, and still she did not go in — she hesitated outside like someone too struck with awe and thankfulness to enter. She had so much, she had everything: a distinguished, successful husband, attentive and generous; a fine old house now in its new splendor after being decorated by the famous Katrin, her own Kate, her closest friend at college, her roommate, celebrated now in all the fashionable centers as one of the world's outstanding decorators. Kate's fabulous success had not surprised Mary. Kate — Katrin, whatever she chose to call herself — had always known what she wanted; her ambition was even greater than her remarkable talent, and she did not let anything stand in her way.

That first day at college, when they had been assigned to the same room, Kate had said even before she acknowledged the introduction by the house mother: "Take off that red sweater at once and get a pale pink one. Don't you know red eats you up, destroys you? Haven't you any idea what strong colors do to you?"

They had roomed together for four years, and though Kate supervised the buying of everything Mary wore, Mary never came to have any intimate knowledge of Kate; there was no exchange after dates of what he said and I said, what he did and I did, because Kate didn't have dates; she didn't want any — she said she couldn't waste the time, she had to get on with her work; if ever she saw the man she wanted she would know what to do, and until then she would concentrate on her career. Later there were the years when Kate was out of the country, first in Europe, then in South America, recently in the West Indies, always doing brilliant work on important hotels and houses; while she was away she had missed Mary's wedding, hadn't even met Arnold. Then by the greatest of good luck Kate, long since known professionally as Katrin, had come back just when the house was ready to be redecorated; Mary had begged her on the telephone to do it, and Kate had come from New York and had spent long hours talking with Mary and Arnold, together and separately, before she had accepted the job.

Now the house was ready and waiting to receive her, to enclose her in its new graciousness, and the cold night was pushing Mary forward, its bite and bitterness insisting that she enter.

Her key dangled from a small golden heart encrusted with pearls — Arnold's engagement present; it slipped easily into the lock and she

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called out gaily as the door opened; but there was no answer. It didn't matter — her eagerness was like a joyful fountain inside her; after all it might be more fun to see the house alone.

Her hand found the light switch.

It was as if the lights had given a signal for a detonation and a savage attack. Silent forces burst around her; her eyes were assaulted, her breath snatched from her. The deep rancid green of the wallpaper in the entrance hall swirled around her. She swayed and stumbled, plowing through it as through billows of water rushing upon her in gigantic waves; she tried to cry out but the green was suffocating her, muffling her outcry as it pressed against her lungs; wildly she grabbed at the banisters as the bright green of the carpeted stairs, like a sea monster of overwhelming strength, snapped and gnawed at her ankles.

In despair she pulled herself upstairs, but again she walked in turmoil and her feet were now in the frightening mire of a blood-red carpet; then the brilliant yellow of the guest room assailed her, choking off whatever air there was, and she ran in terror to another room. She looked with horror at its walls painted like a garish circus tent and recognized it as the room she had intended for a nursery, and on the wainscoating the brightly painted animals of a caged menagerie might have come to life and suddenly escaped their bars — they seemed to jump at her and overwhelm her.

Mary clawed against the walls until she felt bits of plaster beneath her fingernails; nausea descended upon her — and panic. She closed her eyes against the onslaught and moaned the names of Arnold and Kate — but there was no answer, except from somewhere deep in the house there seemed to come the murmur of voices and of laughter. Wildly, her hysteria soaring, she looked for escape. There must be some place where she could hide, some closet where the colors could not reach her; but she could find no door to open, and she faltered along the hallways until she came to the upstairs sitting-room. There her fear became even more hysterical — the walls painted in chocolate and chartreuse stripes might have been whips to flay her.

A prayer was on her lips but she had no strength to say it. She knew then that her life was in jeopardy and through the merciless barrage of color she struggled back downstairs, using as her guide in the swirling labyrinth of color the laughter she heard faintly from somewhere. The sounds might have been the voices of the Lorelei or of the sirens beckoning her to disaster. Yet surely in that place from which the voices came, the library, she would find help — Kate and Arnold were there; she knew it, but destruction raced toward her like a demented lover and jerked her into its ghastly embrace. All the hideous colors suddenly combined and joined forces, converged upon her, and then the mauve of the living room made

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the ultimate attack. It rained down from the walls and inundated her; she collapsed onto the thick pile of the maroon carpet in a finality of terror . . .

Part Five

The flight had just been announced and the passengers with their packages, magazines, and luggage bolted toward the waiting plane. Dr. Meadows picked up his brief case, held out his hand, and thanked Anderson for his kindness in coming to talk with him.

At that moment Anderson knew that the question had at last formed itself — his brain gave birth to the query that had so long been in gestation if only his lips could say it; but now there was no time for tentativeness — the plane waited, the anthropologist must board it and leave.

Miraculously, the question was spontaneous. Anderson said, "In all your experiences with various cultures and races have you ever come upon an instance in which color has been used lethally?"

Dr. Meadows considered the question, then he asked one of his own to be sure that he had understood. "Do you mean color used in the deadly sense that Dorothy L. Sayers used the bells in *The Nine Tailors* — as the actual instrument of death?"

"Exactly. *Can color be used to commit murder?*"

"I've never heard of it."

The answer was unqualified.

And it was no.

Anderson watched the anthropologist enter the plane. Then he stood while the plane lifted itself from the field and lost itself in the night's low swarming clouds.

After all those years he had been able to ask that fantastic question — and the answer had been negative. But as he walked back through the crowds arriving and departing he realized that he had found the answer he wanted, that he had given it to himself. It might seem like fantasy or aberration but it was true. He knew of one instance in which color had been the instrument of death — the murder weapon.

NEXT MONTH . . .

A deeply moving detective story —

MARK VAN DOREN's *Only on Rainy Nights*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JACK LONDON**

TITLE: ***King of the Lepers***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Kauai — in the Hawaiian Islands

TIME: Early in the 20th Century

COMMENTS: *The deeply moving story of human misery and inhuman justice — and of a manhunt unique in the annals of crime . . . 24-carat Jack London.*

BECAUSE WE ARE SICK THEY TAKE away our liberty. We have obeyed the law. We have done no wrong. And yet they would put us in prison. Molokai is a prison. That you know. Niuli, there, his sister was sent to Molokai seven years ago. He has not seen her since. Nor will he ever see her. She must stay there until she dies. This is not Niuli's will. It is the will of the white men who rule the land. And who are these white men?

"We know. We have it from our fathers and our fathers' fathers. They came like lambs, speaking softly. Well might they speak softly, for we were many and strong, and all the islands were ours. Today all the islands are theirs, all the land, all the cattle — everything is theirs. They live like kings in houses of many rooms, with multitudes of servants to care for them. They who had nothing now have everything, and if you, or I, or any Kanaka be hungry, they sneer and say, 'Well, why don't you work? There are the plantations.'"

Koolau paused. He raised one hand, and with gnarled and twisted fingers lifted up the blazing wreath of hibiscus that crowned his black hair. The moonlight bathed the scene in silver. It was a night of peace.

They sat, flower-garlanded, in the perfumed, luminous night, and their lips made uncouth noises and their throats rasped approval of Koolau's speech. They were creatures who once had been men and women. But they were men and women no longer. They

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were monsters. Their hands, when they possessed them, were like harpy-claws. Their faces were the misfits and slips, crushed and bruised by some mad god at play in the machinery of life. Here and there were features which the mad god had smeared half away, and one woman wept scalding tears from twin pits of horror, where her eyes once had been. Some were in pain and groaned from their chests. Others coughed, making sounds like the tearing of tissue. Two were idiots, more like huge apes marred in the making, until even an ape were an angel. They lowed and gibbered in the moonlight, under crowns of drooping, golden blossoms. One, whose bloated ear-lobe flapped like a fan upon his shoulder, caught up a gorgeous flower of orange and scarlet and with it decorated the monstrous ear that flip-flapped with his every movement.

And over these things Koolau was king. And this was his kingdom — a flower-throttled gorge, with beetling cliffs and crags, from which floated the blattings of wild goats. On three sides the grim walls rose, festooned in fantastic draperies of tropic vegetation and pierced by cave entrances — the rocky lairs of Koolau's subjects. On the fourth side the earth fell away into a tremendous abyss and, far below, could be seen the summits of lesser peaks and crags at whose bases foamed and rumbled the Pacific surge. In fine weather a boat could land on the rocky beach that marked the entrance of Kalalau Valley, but the weather must be very fine. And an experienced mountaineer could climb from the beach to the head of Kalalau Valley, to this pocket among the peaks where Koolau ruled; but such a mountaineer must be very cool of head, and he must know the wild-goat trails as well. The marvel was that the mass of human wreckage that constituted Koolau's people should have been able to drag its helpless misery over the giddy goat-trails to this inaccessible spot.

"Brothers," Koolau began.

But one of the lowing, apelike travesties emitted a wild shriek of madness, and Koolau waited while the shrill noise was tossed back and forth among the rocky walls and echoed distantly through the pulseless night.

"Brothers, is it not strange? Ours was the land, and behold, the land is not ours. Have you received one dollar, as much as one dollar, any one of you, for the land? Yet it is theirs, and in return they tell us we can go to work on the land, their land, and that what we produce by our toil shall be theirs. Yet in the old days we did not have to work. Also, when we are sick, they take away our freedom."

"Who brought the sickness, Koolau?" demanded Kiloliana, a lean and wiry man with a face so like a laughing faun's that one might expect to see the cloven hoofs under him. They were cloven, it was true, but the cleavages were great ulcers and livid putrefactions. Yet this was Kiloliana, the most daring climber of them all, the man who knew every goat-trail and

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who had led Koolau and his wretched followers into the recesses of Kalalau.

"Aye, well questioned," Koolau answered. "Because we would not work the miles of sugar cane where once our horses pastured, they brought the Chinese slaves from over seas. And with them came the Chinese sickness — that which we suffer from and because of which they would imprison us on Molokai. We were born on Kauai. We have been to the other islands, some here and some there, to Oahu, to Maui, to Hawaii, to Honolulu. Yet always did we come back to Kauai. Why did we come back? There must be a reason. Because we love Kauai. We were born here. Here we have lived. And here shall we die — unless — unless — there be weak hearts among us. Such we do not want. They are fit for Molokai. And if there be such, let them not remain.

"Tomorrow the soldiers land on the shore. Let the weak hearts go down to them. They will be sent swiftly to Molokai. As for us, we shall stay and fight. But know that we will not die. We have rifles. You know the narrow trails where men must creep, one by one. I, alone, Koolau, who was once a cowboy on Niihau, can hold the trail against a thousand men. Here is Kapalei, who was once a man with honor, but who is now a hunted rat, like you and me. Hear him. He is wise."

Kapalei arose. Once he had been a judge. He had gone to college at Punahou. He had sat at meat with lords and chiefs and the high representatives of alien powers who protected the interests of traders and missionaries. But now he was a creature outside the law. His face was featureless save for gaping orifices and lidless eyes that burned under hairless brows.

"Let us not make trouble," Kapalei began. "We ask to be left alone. But if they do not leave us alone, then is the trouble theirs, and the penalty also. My fingers are gone, as you see." He held up his stumps of hands. "Yet have I the joint of one thumb left, and it can pull a trigger as firmly as did its lost neighbor in the old days. We love Kauai. Let us live here, or die here, but do not let us go to the prison of Molokai. We have not sinned. I have been a judge. I know the law and the justice, and I say to you it is unjust to steal a man's land, to make that man sick with the Chinese sickness, and then to put that man in prison for life."

"Life is short, and the days are filled with pain," said Koolau. "Let us drink and dance and be as happy as we can."

From one of the rocky lairs calabashes were produced and passed around. The calabashes were filled with the fierce distillation of the root of the *ti*-plant; and as the liquid fire coursed through them and mounted to their brains, they forgot that they had once been men and women, for they were men and women once more. The woman who wept scalding tears from open eye-pits was indeed a woman apulse with life as she plucked the strings of a ukulele and lifted her

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voice in a barbaric love-call such as might have come from the dark forest-depths of the primeval world. The air tingled with her cry, softly imperious and seductive. Upon a mat, timing his rhythm to the woman's song, Kiloliana danced. It was unmistakable. Love danced in all his movements. Next, dancing with him on the mat, was a woman whose heavy hips and generous breast gave the lie to her disease-corroded face. It was a dance of the living dead, for in their disintegrating bodies life still loved and longed. Ever the woman whose sightless eyes ran scalding tears chanted her love-cry, ever the dancers danced of love in the warm night, and ever the calabashes went around till in all their brains were maggots crawling of memory and desire. And with the woman on the mat danced a slender maid whose face was beautiful and unmarred, but whose twisted arms that rose and fell marked the disease's ravage.

But the woman's love-cry broke midway, the calabashes were lowered, and the dancers ceased, as all gazed into the abyss above the sea where a rocket flared like a wan phantom through the moonlit air.

"It is the soldiers," said Koolau. "Tomorrow there will be fighting. It is well to sleep and be prepared."

The lepers obeyed, crawling away to their lairs in the cliff, until only Koolau remained, sitting motionless in the moonlight, his rifle across his knees, as he gazed far down to the boats landing on the beach.

The head of Kalalau Valley had been well chosen as a refuge. Except Kiloliana, who knew back-trails up the precipitous walls, no man could win to the gorge save by advancing across a knife-edged ridge. This passage was a hundred yards in length. At best, it was a scant twelve inches wide. On either side yawned the abyss. A slip, and to right or left the man would fall to his death. But once across he would find himself in an earthly paradise. A sea of vegetation laved the landscape, pouring its green billows from wall to wall, dripping from the cliff-lips in great vine-masses, and flinging a spray of ferns and air-plants into the multitudinous crevices. During the many months of Koolau's rule, he and his followers had fought with this vegetable sea. The choking jungle, with its riot of blossoms, had been driven back from the bananas, oranges, and mangoes that grew wild. In little clearings grew the wild arrowroot; on stone terraces, filled with soil scrapings, were the *taro* patches and the melons; and in every open space where the sunshine penetrated, were *papaia* trees burdened with their golden fruit.

Koolau had been driven to this refuge from the lower valley by the beach. And if he were driven from it in turn, he knew of gorges among the jumbled peaks of the inner fastnesses where he could lead his subjects and live. And now he lay with his rifle beside him, peering down through a tangled screen of foliage at the soldiers on the beach. He noted that

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they had large guns with them, from which the sunshine flashed as from mirrors. The knife-edged passage lay directly before him. Crawling upward along the trail that led to it he could see tiny specks of men. He knew they were not the soldiers, but the police. When they failed, then the soldiers would enter the game.

Affectionately Koolau rubbed a twisted hand along his rifle barrel and made sure that the sights were clean. He had learned to shoot as a wild-cattle hunter on Niihau, and on that island his skill as a marksman was unforgotten.

As the toiling specks of men grew nearer and larger, he estimated the range, judged the deflection of the wind that swept at right angles across the line of fire, and calculated the chances of overshooting marks that were so far below his level. But he did not shoot. Not until they reached the beginning of the passage did he make his presence known. He did not show himself, but spoke from the thicket.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"We want Koolau, the leper," answered the man who led the native police, himself a blue-eyed American.

"You must go back," Koolau said.

He knew the man, a deputy sheriff, for it was by him that he had been harried out of Niihau, across Kauai, to Kalalau Valley, and out of the valley to the gorge.

"Who are you?" the sheriff asked.

"I am Koolau, the leper."

"Then come out. We want you. Dead or alive, there is a thousand dollars on your head. You cannot escape."

Koolau laughed aloud in the thicket.

"Come out!" the sheriff commanded, and was answered by silence.

He conferred with the police, and Koolau saw that they were preparing to rush him.

"Koolau," the sheriff called. "Koolau, I am coming across to get you."

"Then look first and well about you at the sun and sea and sky, for it will be the last time you behold them."

"That's all right, Koolau," the sheriff said soothingly. "I know you're a dead shot. But you won't shoot me. I have never done you any wrong."

Koolau grunted in the thicket.

"I say, you know I've never done you any wrong, have I?" the sheriff persisted.

"You do me wrong when you try to put me in prison," was the reply. "And you do me wrong when you try for the thousand dollars on my head. If you will live, stay where you are."

"I've got to come across and get you. I'm sorry, but it is my duty."

"You will die before you get across."

The sheriff was no coward. Yet was he undecided. He gazed into the gulf on either side, and ran his eyes along the knife-edge he must travel. Then he made up his mind.

"Koolau," he called.

But the thicket remained silent.

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"Koolau, don't shoot. I am coming."

The sheriff turned, gave some orders to the police, then started on his perilous way. He advanced slowly. It was like walking a tightrope. He had nothing to lean upon but the air. The lava rock crumbled under his feet, and on either side the dislodged fragments pitched downward. The sun blazed upon him, and his face was wet with sweat. Still he advanced, until the halfway point was reached.

"Stop!" Koolau commanded from the thicket. "One more step and I shoot."

The sheriff halted, swaying for balance as he stood poised above the void. His face was pale, but his eyes were determined. He licked his dry lips before he spoke.

"Koolau, you won't shoot me. I know you won't."

He started once more. The bullet whirled him half about. On his face was an expression of querulous surprise as he reeled to the fall. He tried to save himself by throwing his body across the knife-edge; but at that moment he knew death. The next moment the knife-edge was vacant. Then came the rush, five policemen, in single file, with superb steadiness, running along the knife-edge. At the same instant the rest of the posse opened fire on the thicket. It was madness. Five times Koolau pulled the trigger, so rapidly that his shots constituted a rattle. Changing his position and crouching low under the bullets that were biting and singing through the bushes, he peered out. Four of the police had followed the sheriff. The fifth lay across the knife-edge, still alive. On the farther side, no longer firing, were the surviving police. On the naked rock there was no hope for them. Before they could clamber down Koolau could have picked off the last man. But he did not fire.

After a conference one of them took off a white undershirt and waved it as a flag. Followed by another, he advanced along the knife-edge to their wounded comrade. Koolau gave no sign, but watched them slowly withdraw and become specks again as they descended into the lower valley.

Two hours later, from another thicket, Koolau watched a body of police trying to make the ascent from the opposite side of the valley. He saw the wild goats flee before them as they climbed higher and higher, until he doubted his judgment and sent for Kiloliana who crawled in beside him.

"No, there is no way," said Kiloliana.

"The goats?" Koolau questioned.

"They come over from the next valley, but they cannot pass to this. There is no way. Those men are not wiser than goats. They may fall to their deaths. Let us watch."

"They are brave men," said Koolau. "Let us watch."

Side by side they lay among the morning-glories, with the yellow blossoms of the *hau* dropping upon

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them from overhead, watching the motes of men toil upward till the thing happened. Three of them, slipping, rolling, sliding, dashed over a cliff-lip and fell half a thousand feet.

Kiloliana chuckled.

"We will be bothered no more," he said.

"They have war guns," Koolau made answer. "The soldiers have not yet spoken."

In the drowsy afternoon most of the lepers lay in their rock dens asleep. Koolau, his rifle on his knees fresh-cleaned and ready, dozed in the entrance to his own den. The maid with the twisted arm lay below in the thicket and kept watch on the knife-edge passage. Suddenly Koolau was startled wide awake by the sound of an explosion on the beach. The next instant the atmosphere was incredibly rent asunder. The terrible sound frightened him. It was as if all the gods had caught the envelope of the sky in their hands and were ripping it apart as a woman rips apart a sheet of cotton cloth. But it was such an immense ripping, growing swiftly nearer. Koolau glanced up apprehensively, as if expecting to see the thing. Then high up on the cliff overhead the shell burst in a fountain of black smoke. The rock was shattered, the fragments falling to the foot of the cliff.

Koolau passed his hand across his sweaty brow. He was terribly shaken. He had had no experience with shell-fire, and this was more dreadful than anything he had imagined.

"One," said Kapalei, suddenly bethinking himself to keep count.

A second and a third shell flew screaming over the top of the wall, bursting beyond view. Kapalei methodically kept the count. The lepers crowded into the open space before the caves. At first they were frightened, but as the shells continued their flight overhead the leper folk became reassured and began to admire the spectacle. The two idiots shrieked with delight, prancing wild antics as each air-tormenting shell went by. Koolau began to recover his confidence. No damage was being done. Evidently they could not aim such large missiles at such long range with the precision of a rifle.

But then a change came over the situation. The shells began to fall short. One burst below in the thicket by the knife-edge. Koolau remembered the maid who lay there on watch, and ran down to see. The smoke was still rising from the bushes when he crawled in. He was astounded. The branches were splintered and broken. Where the girl had lain was a hole in the ground. The girl herself was in shattered fragments. The shell had burst right on her.

First peering out to make sure no soldiers were attempting the passage, Koolau started back on the run for the caves. All the time the shells were moaning, whining, screaming by, and the valley was rumbling and reverberating with the explosions. As he came in sight of the caves, he saw the two idiots cavorting about, clutching

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each other's hands with their stumps of fingers. Even as he ran, Koolau saw a spout of black smoke rise from the ground near the idiots. They were flung apart bodily by the explosion. One lay motionless, but the other was dragging himself by his hands toward the cave. His legs trailed out helplessly behind him, while the blood was pouring from his body. As he crawled he cried like a little dog. The rest of the lepers, with the exception of Kapalei, had fled into the caves.

"Seventeen," said Kapalei. "Eighteen," he added.

This last shell had entered one of the caves. The explosion caused all the other caves to empty. But from the shelled cave no one emerged. Koolau crept in through the pungent, acrid smoke. Four bodies, frightfully mangled, lay there. One of them was the sightless woman whose tears till now had never ceased.

Outside, Koolau found his people in a panic, already beginning to climb the goat trail that led out of the gorge and on among the jumbled heights and chasms. The wounded idiot, whining feebly and dragging himself along on the ground by his hands, was trying to follow. But at the first pitch of the wall his helplessness overcame him and he fell back.

"It would be better to kill him," said Koolau to Kapalei, who still sat in the same place.

"Twenty-two," Kapalei answered. "Yes, it would be a wise thing to kill him. Twenty-three — twenty-four."

The idiot whined sharply when he saw the rifle leveled at him. Koolau hesitated, then lowered the gun.

"It is a hard thing to do," he said.

"You are a fool — twenty six, twenty seven," said Kapalei. "Let me show you."

He arose and, with a heavy fragment of rock in his hand, approached the wounded thing. As he lifted his arm to strike, a shell burst upon him, relieving him of the necessity of the act and at the same time putting an end to his count.

Koolau was now alone in the gorge. He watched the last of his people drag their crippled bodies over the brow of the height and disappear. Then he turned and went down to the thicket where the maid had been killed. The shell-fire still continued, but he remained; for far below he could see the soldiers climbing up. A shell burst twenty feet away. Flattening himself into the earth, he heard the rush of the fragments above his body. A shower of *hau* blossoms rained upon him. He lifted his head to peer down the trail, and he sighed. He was very much afraid. Bullets from rifles would not have worried him, but this shell-fire was abominable. Each time a shell shrieked by he shivered and crouched; but each time he lifted his head again to watch the trail.

At last the shells ceased. This, he reasoned, was because the soldiers were drawing near. They crept along the trail in single file, and he tried to count them until he lost track. At any rate, there were a hundred or so of them — and all were coming for

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Koolau, the king of the lepers. He felt a prod of pride. With war guns and rifles, police and soldiers, they came for him, and he was only one man, a crippled wreck of a man at that. They offered a thousand dollars for him, dead or alive. In all his life he had never possessed that much money. The thought was a bitter one. Kapalei had been right. He, Koolau, had done no wrong. Because the *haoles* wanted labor with which to work the stolen land, they had brought in the Chinese coolies, and with them had come the sickness. And now, because he had caught the sickness, he was worth a thousand dollars — but not to himself. It was his worthless carcass, rotten with disease or dead from a bursting shell, that was worth all that money.

When the soldiers reached the knife-edged passage, he was prompted to warn them. But his gaze fell upon the body of the murdered maid, and he kept silent. When six had ventured on the knife-edge, he opened fire. Nor did he cease when the knife-edge was bare. He emptied his magazine, reloaded, and emptied it again. He kept on shooting. All his wrongs were blazing in his brain, and he was in a fury of vengeance. All down the goat-trail the soldiers were firing, and though they lay flat and sought to shelter themselves in the shallow inequalities of the surface, they were exposed marks to him. Bullets whistled and thudded about him, and an occasional ricochet sang sharply through air. One bullet plowed a crease through his scalp, and a second burned across his shoulder-blade without breaking the skin.

It was a massacre, in which one man was doing the killing. The soldiers began to retreat, helping along their wounded. As Koolau picked them off he became aware of the smell of burned meat. He glanced about him at first, and then discovered that it was his own hands. The heat of the rifle was doing it. The leprosy had destroyed most of the nerves in his hands. Though his flesh burned and he smelled it, there was no sensation.

He lay in the thicket, smiling, until he remembered the war guns. Without doubt they would open up on him again, and this time upon the very thicket from which he had inflicted the damage. Scarcely had he changed his position to a nook behind a small shoulder of the wall, where he had noted that no shells fell, than the bombardment recommenced. He counted the shells. Sixty more were thrown into the gorge before the war guns ceased. The tiny area was pitted with their explosions, until it seemed impossible that any creature could have survived. So the soldiers thought for, under the burning afternoon sun, they climbed the goat-trail gain. And again the knife-edged passage was disputed, and again they fell back to the beach . . .

For two days longer Koolau held the passage, though the soldiers contented themselves with flinging shells into his retreat. Then Pahau, a leper boy, came to the top of the wall at

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the back of the gorge and shouted down to him that Kiloliana, hunting goats that they might eat, had been killed by a fall, and that the women were frightened and knew not what to do. Koolau called the boy down and left him with a spare gun with which to guard the passage. Koolau found his people disheartened. The majority of them were too helpless to forage food for themselves under such forbidding circumstances, and all were starving. He selected two women and a man who were not too far gone with the disease and sent them back to the gorge to bring up food and mats. The rest he cheered and consoled until even the weakest took a hand in building rough shelters for themselves.

But those he had dispatched for food did not return, and he started back for the gorge. As he came out on the brow of the wall, half a dozen rifles cracked. A bullet tore through the fleshy part of his shoulder, and his cheek was cut by a sliver of rock where a second bullet smashed against the cliff. In the moment that this happened and he leapt back, he saw that the gorge was alive with soldiers. His own people had betrayed him. The shell-fire had been too terrible, and they had preferred the prison of Molokai.

Koolau dropped back and unslung one of his heavy cartridge-belts. Lying among the rocks, he allowed the head and shoulders of the first soldier to rise clearly into view before pulling trigger. Twice this happened, and then, after some delay, in place of a head and shoulders a white flag was thrust above the edge of the wall.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"I want you, if you are Koolau, the king of the lepers," came the answer.

Koolau forgot where he was, forgot everything, as he lay and marveled at the strange persistence of these *haoles* who would have their will though the sky fell in. Aye, they would have their will over all men and all things, even though they died in getting it. He could not but admire that will in them which was stronger than life and which bent all things to their bidding. He was convinced of the hopelessness of his struggle. There was no gainsaying that terrible will of the *haoles*. Though he killed a thousand, yet would they rise like the sands of the sea and come upon him, ever more and more. They never knew when they were beaten. That was their fault and their virtue. It was what his own kind lacked. He could see, now, how the handful of the preachers of God and the preachers of Rum had conquered the land. It was because —

"Well, what have you got to say? Will you come with me?"

It was the voice of the invisible man under the white flag. There he was, like any *haole*, driving straight toward the determined end.

"Let us talk," said Koolau.

The man's head and shoulders arose, then his whole body. He was a

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smooth-faced, blue-eyed youngster of twenty-five, slender and natty in his captain's uniform. He advanced until halted, then seated himself a dozen feet away:

"You are a brave man," said Koolau wonderingly. "I could kill you like a fly."

"No, you couldn't," was the answer.

"Why not?"

"Because you are a man, Koolau, though a bad one. I know your story. You kill fairly."

Koolau grunted, but was secretly pleased.

"What have you done with my people?" he demanded. "The boy, the two women, and the man?"

"They gave themselves up, as I have now come for you to do."

Koolau laughed incredulously.

"I am a free man," he announced. "I have done no wrong. All I ask is to be left alone. I have lived free, and I shall die free. I will never give myself up."

"Then your people are wiser than you," answered the young captain. "Look — they are coming now."

Koolau turned and watched the remnant of his band approach. Groaning and sighing, a ghastly procession, it dragged its wretchedness past. It was given to Koolau to taste a deeper bitterness, for they hurled imprecations and insults at him as they went by; and the panting hag who brought up the rear halted and, with skinny, harpy-claws extended, shaking her snarling death's head from side to side, she laid a curse upon him. One by one they dropped over the lip-edge and surrendered to the hiding soldiers.

"You can go now," said Koolau to the captain. "I will never give myself up. That is my last word. Goodbye."

The captain slipped over the cliff to his soldiers. The next moment, and without a flag of truce, he hoisted his hat on his scabbard, and Koolau's bullet tore through it. That afternoon they shelled him out from the beach, and he retreated into the high inaccessible pockets beyond, the soldiers followed him.

For six weeks they hunted him from pocket to pocket, over the volcanic peaks and along the goat-trails. When he hid in the lantana jungle, they formed lines of beaters, and through lantana jungle and guava scrub they drove him like a rabbit. But always he turned and doubled and eluded. There was no cornering him. When pressed too closely, his sure rifle held them back and they carried their wounded down the goat-trails to the beach. There were times when they did the shooting as his brown body showed for a moment through the underbrush. Once, five of them caught him on an exposed goat-trail between pockets. They emptied their rifles at him as he limped and climbed along his dizzy way. Afterward they found bloodstains and knew that he was wounded.

At the end of six weeks they gave up. The soldiers and police returned to Honolulu, and Kalalau Valley was

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left to him for his own, though head-hunters ventured after him from time to time and to their own undoing.

Two years later, and for the last time, Koolau crawled into a thicket and lay down among the *ti*-leaves and wild ginger blossoms. A slight drizzle of rain began to fall, and he drew a ragged blanket about the distorted wreck of his limbs. His body was covered with an oilskin coat. Across his chest he laid his Mauser rifle, lingering affectionately for a moment to wipe the dampness from the barrel.

The hand with which he wiped had no fingers left upon it with which to pull the trigger.

He closed his eyes, for, from the weakness in his body and the fuzzy turmoil in his brain, he knew that his end was near. Like a wild animal he had crept into hiding to die. Half conscious, aimless and wandering, he lived back in his life to his early manhood on Niihau. As life faded and the drip of the rain grew dim in his ears, it seemed to him that he was once more in the thick of the horse-breaking, with raw colts rearing and bucking under him, his stirrups tied together beneath, or charging madly about the breaking corral and driving the other cowboys over the rails. The next instant, and with seeming naturalness, he found himself pursuing the wild bulls of the upland pastures, roping them and leading them down to the valleys. Again the sweat and dust of the branding pen stung his eyes and bit his nostrils.

All his lusty, whole-bodied youth was his, until the sharp pangs of impending dissolution brought him back. He lifted his monstrous hands and gazed at them in wonder. But how? Why? Why should the wholeness of that wild youth of his change to this? Then he remembered and once again, and for a moment, he was Koolau, the king of the lepers. His eyelids fluttered wearily down and the drip of the rain ceased in his ears. A prolonged trembling set up in his body. This, too, ceased. He half lifted his head, but it fell back. Then his eyes opened, and did not close.

His last thought was of his Mauser, and he pressed it against his chest with his folded, fingerless hands.

EDITORS' NOTE: *Now that you have finished this particular Jack London story, which first appeared in book form in 1912, you will be interested to read excerpts from a letter we just received from Dr. Ira D. Hirschy, Director of the Division of Hansen's Disease in the Department of Health, Honolulu, Hawaii. Dr. Hirschy wrote: "I am frankly asking your help in a matter that affects the future of all patients now recovering from Hansen's disease, the illness termed in the past 'leprosy.'*

"The outlook for recovery from the disease is now bright. The sulfone

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drugs have now been in use long enough to show that they can arrest the disease.

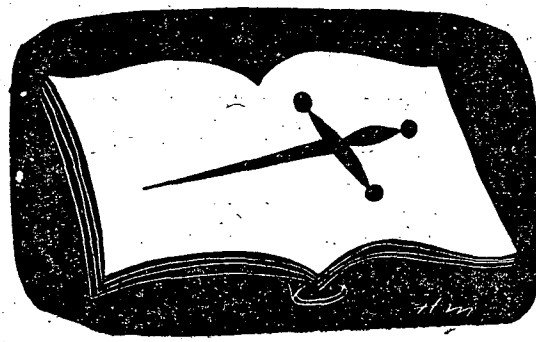
"When the disease is discovered early, patients can escape the crippling and disfiguring that formerly accompanied the illness. . . . Patients are being discharged and are returning to their homes . . . no longer a source of contagion to anyone.

"It is when they return to their communities that they face a real mental hazard — an attitude of fear, prejudice and ostracism that often makes getting a job or living a normal life impossible.

"Much of this attitude of unacceptance stems from out-of-date concepts of Hansen's disease and by the continued use of the terms 'leper' or 'leprosy' to express horror or ostracism . . .

"Magazines can do a constructive service by eliminating use of the words 'leper' and 'leprosy' both as terms of comparison and also when they are used in a misleading medical sense. Medically, the word 'leprosy' is no longer used to describe the disease. In Hawaii, for example, the name was changed to Hansen's disease by legislative action in 1949. Both terms — 'leper' and 'leprosy' — are now avoided because they are always at least partially inaccurate and because the old connotation of 'an incurable disease' is no longer true."

Of course, you realize that it would have been impossible for EQMM to "modernize" the terminology in Jack London's 44-year-old story; but we are glad to have this opportunity to call Dr. Hirschy's letter to the attention of all readers — in order, as Dr. Hirschy himself put it, "to help erase outmoded attitudes toward the disease and to further acceptance for discharged Hansen's disease patients."



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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **BEN HECHT**

TITLE: ***The Tired Horse***

TYPE: Swindle Story

LOCALE: Chicago

TIME: About 1910

COMMENTS: *A pianist and a sculptor persuade a very young journalist to put up $10, thus financing a fabulous bunco scheme in the "good old days" of five-cent beer and free lunches . . .*

PERHAPS THE FINEST COUNTRY IN the world is Youth. I once lived in it. It was a country without disasters. There may have been griefs but I don't remember them. I remember only a sort of parade. Music sounded. People cheered. And it seems I rode one of the Floats. What I represented is vague in my mind — possibly Poverty, or Balboa on a peak in Darien.

I have made a ridiculous statement — no disasters in the Land of Youth! Dear Lord, there were nothing but disasters. Poverty, defeat, heartbreaks, dashed hopes, and crushed ego were always on the menu. The difference was (between then and now) that you laughed at these offerings. Misfortune always seemed to wear a clown suit in that Land. Later you remembered more the laughter than the slapstick that had flattened you.

Thus I still chuckle at one of the blackest hours that ever smote a lad of seventeen. It was an hour in which I lost a fortune and saw my future lying wrecked around my feet. It was very funny.

I was employed on the Chicago *Journal* at the time as a reporter. My salary was $12 a week. I was paid on Tuesday. On Friday I was broke. I then turned into a sort of Robinson Crusoe and lived on the terrain till the ghost walked again.

One Tuesday night I met two men in one of the haunts of my solvent hours. This was a saloon called Quincey No. 9, where they served free bowls of walnuts to inflame the thirst of the customers. The two men were Max Kramm and Jo Davidson.

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Max was a piano-virtuoso-to-be, and Jo was a famous-sculptor-to-be. On this Tuesday night they were as unknown as a pair of locusts.

"We have been waiting for someone to drop in we know," said Max, "in the hope we can raise ten dollars."

I blushed guiltily.

"If Jo and I can get hold of ten dollars," Max continued, "we could eat like kings for a whole year without another penny."

"How?" I asked, always fascinated by financial schemes.

"Otto Schlummer owns a saloon close by where we live in the Milwaukee Avenue loft," said Max. "In this saloon is the finest free lunch in the whole America. Jo and I go into Schlummer's saloon every day, twice. We each order one glass of beer and we discuss art with Herr Schlummer."

"His grandfather was a frame maker in Leipzig," said Jo. "He has a soft spot."

"And we eat the free lunch," said Max. "Cheese, ham, herring, sauerkraut, pickles, pumpernickel, and sausages. The eating is free, but the beer is five cents a glass. We go to Schlummer's saloon twice a day for three months now, so you can figure what we owe him."

"The figure is eighteen dollars," said Jo.

"Which is eight dollars beyond the Schlummer credit limit," said Max. "But he is through making an exception for us because we are artists. He sent us a letter."

"We are through eating," said Jo.

"So you want to pay Schlummer what you owe him?" I said. Nervously I added, "And re-establish your credit?"

"Pay Schlummer!" Max frowned. "That would be only shortsighted. Here is the idea Jo and I have developed, while choking to death on these horrible walnuts."

"I paint a picture," said Jo, "a big one. I sign it with some name like Gustave Rumpelmeyer and we take it to an insurance company and insure it for three thousand dollars."

"That is where the ten dollars comes in," said Max. "It is called the first premium."

"Our next move is we take this genuine 'Rumpelmeyer' to Otto Schlummer and tell him it is a masterpiece just arrived from my uncle in Munich who has asked us to sell it to the Art Museum," said Jo.

"But we tell him we are afraid to keep it," said Max, "because there is no key on the door of our loft."

"No door," said Jo.

"We show Herr Schlummer how valuable the painting is by the insurance papers which we have," said Max. "And we beg him to be the custodian for the 'Rumpelmeyer.' And then without the subject being mentioned, the 'Rumpelmeyer' becomes the collateral."

"He means we resume eating and drinking, free," said Jo.

"For a year at least," said Max; "or maybe the rest of our lives."

"I'd like to help you out," I began, "but —"

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"Today is your payday," said Max, coldly.

I handed over $10.

"That's a beautiful gesture," said Jo, as if I had volunteered the money, "and deserves to be rewarded."

He wrote on a piece of paper and handed it to me.

"This gives you a half interest in the 'Rumpelmeyer' painting, 'The Tired Horse,' which I am going home now and paint," said Jo. "Whoever sells it has to pay you half the money it bring us."

Since no painting of Jo's had yet brought in the price of a shave, I was not overcome by the deal. But I liked documents. They made me feel grown up. I pocketed this one and walked home to my North Dearborn Street room, a distance of three miles.

Two weeks later, running into Max on Michigan Avenue, I received an invitation to join him and Jo for dinner — if I didn't mind standing up while dining.

"We have to talk to Herr Schlummer while we eat," said Max. "He is as hungry for talk about the 'Rumpelmeyer' as we are for sausages."

"The masterpiece worked, eh," I said.

"Superbly," said Max. "Schlummer has hung it in his bedroom and put a padlock on the door. And he is convinced Jo and I are very rich, because we own a masterpiece insured for three thousand dollars. But more important, he is proud to be finally in the footsteps of his grandfather from Leipzig."

A block away from our destination a clamor began to fill the late winter afternoon. Bells were clanging, people shouting.

"It's a fire," said Max. "Hurry up if you want to see anything. These places around here burn fast."

Fire engines blocked the street. A red glare was in the sky.

Jo Davidson joined us.

I led the way, waving my reporter's card, with Jo and Max yelling, "Make way for the Press." We stopped across the street from the fire.

My companions were unable to speak. A corner saloon was burning and the flat above it was spouting flames and smoke.

Max finally gasped, "Schlummer's," and Jo added in an awed voice, "Three thousand dollars."

We stood blissfully watching the fire. The Rumpelmeyer masterpiece — "The Tired Horse" — was somewhere in that inferno, being consumed by flame or chopped to pieces by brave firemen.

I had never felt the touch of riches before. A half of the insurance was $1500. On $1500 I could live for a year without work, like a millionaire (it was long ago), finish my novel and become famous. I would become a man of letters through Rumpelmeyer's masterpiece.

I glanced at Jo and Max. They looked downright silly with happiness.

Suddenly a shout filled the street. I heard a woman scream in a German accent, "In God's name — no, no, Otto!" And I saw a portly man throw

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off restraining hands and with a cry, "Der Rumpelmeyer, der Rumpelmeyer!" dart into the smoke-and-flame-filled saloon. A groan went up from the crowd. Schlummer was beloved in the neighborhood. Firemen brought up a hose and let fly into the saloon with a great stream of hurtling water.

Then out of the flame and smoke and cataracts, Otto Schlummer reappeared, tottering and coughing. Under his arm he carried, like some holy relic miraculously intact, the Rumpelmeyer masterpiece.

"To hell mitt the saloon!" Schlummer cried happily. "I have saved a masterpiece!"

And Max Kramm looked grimly at Jo Davidson.

"That's like human history for you," he said. "A lousy picture he saves! The free lunch he lets burn up!"

"O"

NEXT MONTH . . .

An unusual Western crime story —

THEODORE STURGEON's

and DON WARD's

The Waiting Thing Inside

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MIGNON G. EBERHART**

TITLE: ***Date to Die***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: James Wickwire

LOCALE: An ocean resort in the South

COMMENTS: *What would you do if you found warnings that you were going to die tomorrow? That was Mr. Brown's problem. He solved it by consulting an elderly banker who was a born detective.*

"BUT YOU'RE NOT DEAD!" I addressed Mr. Brown, and it was a fatuous statement inasmuch as he sat opposite me, large as life and indeed larger, an effect which was due in some degree to the violently botanical design on his sports shirt.

He said, "Look at the date."

I was already looking; I was, in fact, fascinated by the two objects he had proffered for my regard. One was a paper-bound club membership list which included, after the name of each member, certain vital statistics of birth, education, business, married or unmarried state and, if there was one, date of death. And someone had inked in above the printed statistics following Mr. Brown's name a rather grisly and certainly anticipatory item: Died, October 9, 1954.

The second exhibit was a fat engagement diary, opened to the date October ninth. There was one entry, scrawled in irregular but legible writing which read simply: *Date to die.*

It was late afternoon and so quiet that I could hear the slow wash of the waves against the beach which lay below the pleasant house Iliff Brown had leased, and also below the resort hotel where I was spending what, up to then, had been a quiet vacation.

"October ninth," Mr. Brown said. "Today's the eighth."

This had not escaped my attention. But it was the third exhibit in his extraordinary tale which really troubled me and this, strictly speaking, was not an exhibit. I said, "You discovered both these extraordinary entries. You decided it was a joke—"

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"Damned unpleasant one," said Mr. Brown.

I heartily agreed with him. I went on. "However, you got to thinking of your will. You went to the safe-deposit vault in the bank. You signed in as usual; you used your key in conjunction with that of the clerk in the vault, got out your own safe-deposit box —"

"And found the slip of paper tucked into the envelope with my will! It said, *Will to be probated following Iliff Brown's death on October ninth.*"

"I wish you had saved the slip of paper."

"Well, I didn't. It upset me. I wadded it up and threw it into the wastebasket."

"You ought to have reported it to the manager of the safe-deposit department."

"I decided to forget it. It was time to go South; I had already leased this house. So we came. Nothing else happened, no threats, nothing. It was absurd to take it seriously —"

"My dear sir," I said sharply. "This is a very serious thing. Someone had to get hold of your safe-deposit key. Someone had to forge your name on the record card for the file."

My name, I should say, is James Wickwire; and the bank in which Mr. Brown had rented his safe-deposit box was the bank where I have spent most of my life; I am its senior vice-president. We have always believed our safe-deposit system to be burglar-proof.

It is the generally accepted system; the lessee of a safe-deposit box signs a card; he receives a key to the box. Another key is reserved by the vault department; both keys are required to open and extract a box. At any time the client wishes to get out his box he signs the record card; this signature naturally must correspond with the original signature. The clerk then proceeds to unlock the box, using both the vault key and the client's key. It is a simple system, this double check, but up to then efficacious. "Have you consulted with anyone about this?" I said.

"I told one or two fellows at the club. Just by way of conversation. They thought it was a joke. I told nobody else."

"Why have you told me now?"

"Because tomorrow's the ninth."

He had a point there. If it was not a practical joke there were exceedingly unpleasant alternatives. I stared at the sinister little message in the engagement book: *Date to die.*

Mr. Brown leaned forward. "I don't mind telling you, now that it's so near the date, I've got the wind up. I heard you were staying at the hotel and I recognized your name and I — I thought I'd like to tell you about it."

"I understand that. But I really don't see what I can do."

Neither apparently did Mr. Brown. There was another silence while several waves washed in and out upon the beach. I closed the engagement book. "Mr. Brown," I said. "I am afraid I must ask you a rather personal ques-

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tion. Would anybody, say, close to you —"

He broke in. "I've thought of that. Somebody close to me would have to get my key. Somebody close to me would have to study my signature in order to forge it and get into my safe-deposit box. It's too big a vault, too many people have boxes there, for the clerks in the vault to know your face — unless you visit your box far more often than I do. Yes, it would have to be somebody close to me.

"But there's nobody close to me who would do it. I am not married. I have no near relatives. I am not a rich enough man to offer any inducement for — well, let's face it — for anybody to murder me in order to get hold of my money. And I haven't got an enemy in the world."

This is a rash statement for a man of fifty-odd to make. However, I could only accept it.

I had seen two feminine figures in and about the house and the beach. I said, "You are not alone here."

"Oh, no. My ward, Joan Baker, has made her home with me since she was a little girl. I made out with a string of housekeepers when she was younger and at home only for vacations. But she got out of school this spring and Willie took over."

The young blonde girl I had seen must be the ward, Joan Baker. The other woman, older, was a faded, thin little thing who looked as if once she had been very pretty, and scurried nervously about the place and smiled all the time. "Willie?" I said.

"Edith Willever. She was my secretary — oh, for years. I thought Joan ought to have somebody around to run the house, chaperon her — that kind of thing. Willie's not very efficient but she's like one of the family." He sighed. "As a matter of fact, this is Willie's birthday. We're having a little celebration tonight, just the four of us."

"Four?"

"A young friend of Joan's is spending a few days with us. Name is Francis Danielo. Young fellow from Brooklyn. Leads a dance band." He brooded. "Joan calls him Danny."

I said, not very astutely, "You don't approve of their friendship."

"They're talking of marriage. Joan's too young. And she's got money — or will have when she's twenty-one and that's next year. I want her to look around before she marries, take some time, know what she wants."

In the house a clock struck six. Mr. Brown heaved himself up and came to the desk and gathered up the two books with their ugly little messages. I watched while he locked them in a drawer.

"This is all nonsense, of course," he said. "A joke. What else could it be?"

We both knew what else it could be. I said, "Have you taken any measures of protection? Merely in the event that it's not a joke?"

"Yes," he said shortly and patted a bulge beneath his tentlike sports shirt which I took to be a gun. He then gave me an embarrassed glance. "Don't know why I got worked up

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like this. There's nothing to it, of course. Nothing you can do about it. Sorry I bothered you."

He walked across the lawn with me toward the hotel. We parted at the hibiscus hedge.

Once back at the hotel I put in two telephone calls to New York and went in to dinner.

There is a general impression that banks, and bankers, are surrounded by all but impenetrable red tape; in a sense, perhaps, this is true. At the same time, when necessary, there are some short cuts through that red tape. And since our business concerns people and their money, two somewhat explosive commodities, we are more or less prepared for emergency.

By the time I had finished dinner I received one reply to my telephone inquiry. Iliff Brown, I was informed, was the perfectly reputable owner of a small but solid brokerage business. He had administered his ward's estate properly and successfully, augmenting a moderate inheritance to a substantial fortune. There was no suggestion of any sort of hocus-pocus.

The reply to my second telephone call came a few moments later and was equally positive. And very perplexing.

So perplexing indeed that after some thought I effected a change of rooms for myself, from the south end of the hotel to the north end. Once my effects were resettled, I went to the windows which, as I had expected, overlooked the house beyond the tall hibiscus hedge. It was then nearly midnight, and the beginning of October ninth.

The house was already dark. In all probability nothing would happen. And in any event, to be forewarned is to be forearmed, and Mr. Brown was both. Nevertheless I got into pajamas and a dressing gown and prepared to watch. As it developed I had not long to wait.

Yet when it happened there was nothing to see — no lights, no movement around the house, only a sound like the explosion of a large firecracker. But within seconds, lights began to spring up in the house beyond the hedge. Someone flung open a door and shouted "*Murder!*"

I dressed swiftly but by the time I got downstairs there were sounds of police sirens shrieking through the night and a little knot of excited hotel guests on the lawn outside. I clutched somebody's arm. "What happened over there?"

He gave me a wild look. "Murder! Shot through the heart."

"Brown?"

"No, no, his housekeeper! Miss Willever. Shot —" He broke off as the sirens swooped into the drive of the house next door. "There's the police!" he cried.

So murder had occurred, and on on October ninth. But it wasn't the murder of Mr. Brown. I took a quiet path down to the sea, around the end of the hibiscus hedge and up toward the house, which by then was alive with lights, policemen, and general

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commotion. Mr. Brown, huge in a striped purple and white dressing gown, was in the middle of it. A dark young man, clad airily in white tennis shorts and a brown suntan, hovered on the edges. The policemen surged like a wave into the house and Mr. Brown saw me. He seized my hand and wrung it convulsively.

"They got her!" he babbled. "They got her instead of me. It was dark — she was downstairs — whoever killed her was waiting. He thought it was me and shot her —"

He gave my hand a last convulsive grasp and followed the policemen into the front door. The young man in tennis shorts had disappeared. I went into the house, too, and as none of the group in the living room seemed aware of my presence — indeed, their attention was riveted upon a sad and tragic object on the floor — I went on to the quiet little study where Mr. Brown and I had talked that afternoon.

It wasn't a practical joke. It was in deadly earnest. Except Miss Edith Willever, poor woman, was the victim of it. And I really did not know what to do, but I had to do something.

Eventually, I decided to join the commotion still going on in the front of the house, and was about to do so when the door of the study was flung open and a girl rushed in, gave me a frightened look, and turned as if to rush out again. It was the girl whose blonde head and, I might say, extremely attractive figure in swimming costume, I had seen on the beach and about the house — in short, Mr. Brown's ward, Joan Baker. She was now wearing a white terrycloth bathrobe which she clutched childishly around her. I said, "Please come in. I'd like to ask you some questions."

She gave me another terrified look and burst into tears.

I am and intend to remain a bachelor, but I am not insensible to beauty in distress. It seemed my clear duty to supply a shoulder for her to weep upon and, I daresay, a few impersonal pats on her blonde head. I was thus occupied when the door was flung open again and the swarthy young man stalked in.

Now, I have observed that persons from Brooklyn — the Dodgers, for instance — have a certain gift for direct and forceful action. Nevertheless, I was surprised to find myself flat on the floor without at all knowing how I got there. Oddly, too, my jaw was thrusting its way up through the top of my head. The girl flung herself at young Danielo. "He's only a policeman. He wants to ask some questions."

It seemed prudent, just then, not to correct her impression. As she hung firmly onto his arm, I got somewhat cautiously to my feet and summoned what dignity I could. I then rubbed my jaw and the young man said in a menacing way that he didn't like cops. "But I'll tell you exactly what I told the other cops and that's all I know. I was asleep. A shot woke me. It was dark. Then lights went on in the hall and I could hear Mr. Brown running

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downstairs. So I jumped up and ran down, too. She was dead. Brown sent me to phone for police. He ran outdoors and shouted for help. Joan came down and I told her what had happened. We started to search the house and grounds. Then the police got here. And keep your hands off my girl."

The girl said chidingly but fondly, "Oh, Danny! Watch your temper!"

"Did you see the gun?" I asked.

He gave one shake of his black head. "Mr. Brown has a gun," he volunteered. "He was showing it to the other police. It was still on his bedside table. It had not been fired."

Tears welled up in Joan's lovely eyes again. "Oh, it's so terrible," she cried unevenly. "This was her birthday! We all gave her presents and she was so happy and —"

"What were the gifts?" I asked. "Anything valuable?"

"Nothing valuable enough to steal! And besides, they weren't stolen. She —" she gulped. "She's still wearing the watch — Uncle Iliff gave her a lapel watch, with diamonds on it. I gave her a gold cigarette case and Danny gave her flowers."

She began to sob again, which appeared to be in the nature of a last straw for Danny, for he gave me a look of fury and said:

"She can't answer any questions now! *Get out* —" He drew her to the door, and in a gesture designed to induce me to comply with his demand, snapped out the lights. He then said, "My gosh."

There was something awestruck in his voice coming out of the sudden darkness. The girl cried out, "*Danny! What did you do to him?*"

"My gosh," Danny said again. "I didn't mean to hit that hard! You're blue!"

I found the switch and snapped on lights. There was a mirror on the wall and I looked into it. My jaw was slightly red, but that was all. Danny said in the same awestruck voice, "It's gone! But it *was* there —" He snapped off the lights again, and I had rather a shock: for there was a kind of bluish sparkle streaked along my jaw.

After a moment I said into the darkness, "Bring me Miss Willever's birthday gifts. Hurry."

Possibly my voice, as well as the spectral and peculiar qualities my jawbone had assumed, suggested urgency. Within a moment, which I spent in turning the lights off and on before the mirror and making the rather unnerving discovery that one hand had also developed an oddly streaked and slightly blue visibility in the darkness, the girl returned, staggering with the weight of a huge vase of red roses, which she put down on the desk. She then fished out of her pocket a lapel watch — a charming jeweled trinket with a safety clasp — and a gold cigarette case. "They let me have them," she said. "But the chief of police wants to know what business it is of yours."

"Bring him here," I told her. "And Brown and Danny too."

She went away. I snapped off the lights. They came, running, all four

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of them. A strange voice — that of the chief of police, it developed — yelled, "What's the idea? Turn on the lights!"

Someone obliged, but not before I had seen what I expected to see. The police chief was a tall, thin man in uniform and he yelled, "What's the idea?" — again in a most belligerent manner.

So I told him. "My dear sir," I said. "I am obliged to give you certain information. First, I wish to say that Mr. Brown has been a most careful and honest guardian for his ward, Miss Joan Baker. He has had a power of attorney for her; he has administered her property since the death of her parents, and has done so most conscientiously."

Brown put his arm around Joan and drew her fondly to him. Danny glowered. Iliff Brown said, "I discharged my duty to the best of my ability."

I sighed. "But you murdered Miss Willever."

I said it so quietly that for a moment nobody took it in, but only stared at me in a kind of thunderstruck but definitely skeptical manner. So I turned out the lights again and seized Brown's right hand. In the darkness the luminous bluish streaks along his fingers showed quite clearly. He jerked it away from me and made a dash for the door.

There were a few moments of more or less violent activity out in the hall. Then the police chief returned. He snapped on the lights. "What do you mean? They've got him but what —"

He stopped as I extended the lapel watch to him. I then detailed the story Mr. Brown had told me. "But, in fact," I concluded, "this was a careful plan to murder Miss Willever in such a way that Brown himself would be perfectly safe, inasmuch as it would be believed that he, not Miss Willever, was the intended victim and that the murder of Miss Willever was a mistake, since the murderer had intended to shoot Mr. Brown. Therefore the murder had to be accomplished under conditions in which such a mistake was possible — in fact, in total darkness. However, in total darkness, the murderer had to supply himself with a target. In short this —" I was still waving the lapel watch. I said, "Turn out the light, please."

Danny did so. The girl said, "Ooooh." The police chief gave a startled grunt. The lapel watch, too, showed up in a luminous, bluish circle.

I told them what was now obvious enough. "It's luminous paint. It is very sticky and hard to remove. Visible in the dark but looks merely like white enamel in the light. The paint stuck to Brown's hands, you see. He seized my hand when I arrived in what I can only call an excessive show of gratitude. Some of it rubbed off on my own hand and, for a reason I need not explain, onto my jaw."

I think Danny gurgled here in a rather apologetic manner. The chief snapped on the lights and the ghostly little glow faded to a shiny milky

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white. He said, "Why would he kill her?"

My jaw ached. I said shortly, "I'm afraid that's your problem. However, I might suggest that while Miss Joan referred to Brown as Uncle Iliff his — er — embrace of his ward was not exactly avuncular. It occurs to me that Brown wished to marry his ward — and her money."

The girl blushed. "Yes," she whispered. "Yes, he did." Danny growled ominously.

I said, "Since Brown did not embezzle his ward's funds, he did not murder his former secretary to keep her quiet about that. Yet I do feel that Miss Willever had a very strong hold on him of a nature which was likely to block Brown's intention to marry his ward. So I suggest that you investigate the possibility of a secret marriage. I rather think you'll find that Miss Willever was secretly Mrs. Brown."

A curious expression of enlightenment flashed into Joan's face. "Oh!" she cried. "That explains it — she *was* in love with him. I always knew it! She'd have done anything for him. Anything! But she wouldn't have let him —"

"Marry you," I finished.

The chief of police rubbed his long nose. "But, see here! If all this is true, what put you onto it?"

"My dear sir!" I said, really quite shocked. "The safe-deposit box, of course! Our vault is quite impregnable! Such a thing as Brown described simply could not happen. I got in touch with the head of the vault department who informed me that Brown's signature on his file card was not a forgery. Therefore I knew Brown was lying. Therefore I wondered why."

"Why did he tell you about these threats he faked?"

"He had to have a witness, of course. Somebody who could say that he, not Miss Willever, was the object of murderous threats. Oh, by the way, I imagine the murder gun, a second gun, is at the bottom of the ocean. Nothing easier than to toss it across the beach."

The girl flung herself fervently upon me, both arms around my neck. "Oh, I was so afraid they'd say Danny did it. He's so impulsive."

It was not the word I'd have chosen. I strove most earnestly to extricate myself from her arms. The police chief scooped up the watch and dashed for the front hall, shouting, "Hold him! We've got evidence!"

And the boy Danny moved toward me.

I wrenched myself from the girl and dashed out the door, too. Danny, however, caught me in the hall. I braced myself, but he gave me a hurt look. "I was only going to shake hands," he said. "Thank you, Mr. Wickwire."

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

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LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*
AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*
EW: *Elizabeth Watts in the Boston Globe*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

TITLE: *The Great Game*

TYPE: Legal Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Colonel Braxton

LOCALE: Old Virginia

COMMENTS: *That grand old gentleman and scholar, Colonel Braxton, was the one attorney in all of old Virginia who played the "great game" in court: he staked his client's life on a single fact.*

IT WAS A FAMOUS TRIAL. PERSONS still living in Virginia will remember it. There was in it nearly every dramatic incident. The prisoner in the courtroom held the woman beside him silent. He had said he would stand up and confess if she said a word. They were from an elevated class, involved in an emotional tragedy.

These complications made the case unequaled.

The prosecuting attorney was uncertain. Was the man on trial for his life the criminal agent, or was the woman, in fact, guilty of the murder? How far the whole truth was known to Colonel Braxton, who defended the case, is not certain. But it is certain that he could not put the woman — beside him at his table — on the stand under any circumstances.

There was another feature that will not be forgotten — a thing that illustrates the profound strategy of this criminal lawyer in a desperate case: *He staked his client's life on a single fact.*

He disregarded everything else.

He isolated that single fact. He made it the one dominating issue, upon which the whole trial turned, as on a hinge.

The mystery of that fact — rather, the proof of it upon which he depended — he did not reveal. He stated it.

But he stated it in a Delphic manner, and it remained a mystery while the State put in its evidence. This very detail proclaims the ingenuity of the man. For this mystery reserved by the defence cleverly diverted the jury from the testimony of the State.

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The case was on trial in the circuit court.

The prosecuting attorney had made his dramatic opening statement to the jury. He had presented it in detail, and with a covert innuendo that united the evidence he could legally offer with the common knowledge and the common impression about the whole affair. And he did it with skill, for there seemed, when he had finished, no adequate defense.

There was a breathless tension in the whole audience when Colonel Braxton stood up to reply.

The experts about the courtroom knew the dilemma Colonel Braxton was in. The accused man had only been indicted for murder and put to trial for it. The girl had been studiously left out. The prosecuting attorney had seen to that. He did not purpose to take a girl before a Virginia jury, when he had a man to offer. And he knew that Colonel Braxton could not bring her in.

The prosecuting attorney also knew that the prisoner, Fairfield Harris, would not involve her to clear himself. He would go to the gallows with his mouth closed. It was clear to the experts, as it was clear to the prosecutor, that Colonel Braxton would not put the prisoner on the stand — neither the girl nor the client he represented.

What defense, then, could he make?

They waited for the disclosure — the prosecutor confident in his security and every other man leaning forward in his seat.

The girl sat beside young Harris at Colonel Braxton's table.

She could not be denied that right. Harris might exclude her from the jeopardies of the law by his appalling threat; but he could not exclude her from the courtroom. He had exhausted every device to keep her out. But it did not avail. She had brought him into this tragic affair, and she would go with him to its end. Neither young Harris nor Colonel Braxton could move her from that resolve. And, to say the truth, Colonel Braxton had not urged it. He had looked at her vaguely, as though his mind were in another place, and indicated his submission with a gesture.

She was a lovely creature.

There is something in old blood that gives a distinguished beauty and a high courage that appears nowhere in any common strain. It cannot be produced by blends. It does not appear by accident. It is inherent in this purity of stock.

I have seen few equals for Julia Monroe among the beauties of a later world. And yet I cannot catalogue the details of her. It was something beyond the eye that made up this beauty. Certain words are beyond definition: charm and distinction are such words.

I have tried to stop and write down here a detailed description of her. But it is futile and inadequate, and I have stricken the whole thing out.

She was neither embarrassed nor in fear in this courtroom on this after-

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noon. She was motionless, with a face whose composure did not change. But it was the spirit behind the face that gave her distinction. One could see how she had gone to sacrifice, at the call of a decaying family, for material rehabilitation . . . with a high face, like Jephthah's daughter . . .

Colonel Braxton made a slight bow to the judge and to the jury, as to a company of friends. He looked vaguely about him for a moment, like one awakened out of sleep; and then he spoke.

"Your Honor," he said, "all that I shall require for the defense is now in custody of the clerk of this circuit court."

He indicated Mr. Dabney Mason, with a gesture.

There was a lower bench in this courtroom, directly below that for the judge, with an extended railing that made a table. The clerk sat here, his docket opened before him, and his quill pens laid out neatly beside it, his inks — the black for entries and the red for ruling lines — in their tall stone jugs as they came imported into Virginia from the foreign trade. And beyond them, conspicuous to the eye, were his yellow gloves and his Bond Street stick, for he was fastidious in his dress and maintained each detail with punctilious discrimination.

There was a moment of almost suspended breath until Colonel Braxton should go on.

But he did not go on.

His heavy eyelids drooped, as though the sleep out of which he had been awakened had returned, and he sat down.

The whole courtroom was astonished.

And the one whose amazement exceeded that of any other was this circuit clerk. He looked up at Colonel Braxton in a sort of wonder. There was no evidence relating to this trial in his possession. No weapon, no implement, no paper had been lodged with him.

How then could Colonel Braxton be depending for the defense on anything committed to his custody?

But the clerk was accustomed to the vagaries of this eccentric lawyer; to the strange indirections to which he sometimes resorted in a desperate case; to his smokescreens; to his subtle maneuvers.

Colonel Braxton was the one man on this whole circuit of Virginia who opened and conducted the great game for himself. He could not be catalogued. What he would do could not, by the light of stock defenses, be foreseen.

The clerk said nothing. But his amazement was in his face. The whole court could see that he was no less puzzled than themselves. There was no need that he should make a verbal protest.

Neither did the judge reply.

He was equally astonished with the others. But the defense, in these criminal cases, was wholly a matter for the counsel. The judge's concern was only that it should be legal, and presented as the rules of evidence required.

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But the prosecuting attorney, sitting at his table, beyond that of Colonel Braxton, turned.

"Mr. Dabney Mason," he said, "what evidence relating to this case has been lodged with you?"

There was concern in the pronouncement of the words. Was there a confession written out and signed, a letter, some document of import?

The clerk looked up at the man.

"No evidence," he said. Then he smiled, including with a gesture the articles laid out before him: the stick, the yellow gloves, the pens, the inks, the docket. "Unless, sir, these articles can be so considered."

The prosecuting attorney laughed. The defense was merely a gesture then, to cover its inevitable collapse, and he could not resist a comment.

"Well, Colonel," he said, "I thought you would have some big surprise for us."

Colonel Braxton took the unlighted cigar out of his mouth. But he did not look up. His head, as from weariness, drooped. But his voice when he spoke reached clearly to the doors.

"Alfred," he said, "you are like Naaman in the Book of Kings, always looking for a great thing . . . Let us dip ourselves, rather, seven times in Jordan, and leave the cure to the prophet!"

It was now the audience, packed into the courtroom, that laughed, a suppressed ripple that ran lightly over it. The neat counter pleased them. It was from the one book they knew. The Bible in this portion of Virginia was read and its chapters got by heart. A knowledge of it was of more use to the public advocate than the Grattans, or the Commentaries of Mr. Blackstone.

It was a deadly weapon in the hand of a skilled duelist, and here, in this instance, it pinned the prosecuting attorney neatly to the wall.

He got up, then, in a determined manner, and went about the introduction of his evidence. He knew what folly it was to cross wits with this eccentric lawyer; but every now and then, when he seemed to have the whip-hand, he would try it. And always he caught an arrow at some unprotected point. But there was one gain in it: it sent him, more determined, about his case.

The facts of the case can be briefly stated: Duncan Cruger had been killed on the very night of his marriage. Two persons only were present at the time: the prisoner, Fairfield Harris, and the girl, Julia Monroe, who sat here beside him. They had been lovers from the cradle and intended, by every evidence, for each other. But the Monroe family was financially in its decay. It hung by sufferance only, on the very brink of a collapse.

Young Harris had his way to make. The only hope for any material rehabilitation of this descending family was in a marriage of the daughter Julia with Duncan Cruger. He had a great estate. He lived in his big house alone, and for the girl he would clear the ancestral lands and reestablish the house in its ancient splendor. And so,

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like Jephthah's daughter, she had gone to this material sacrifice.

Her family lived at some distance in the country.

The wedding was at noon on a rain-swept November day.

She and Cruger had driven in to his house here in the little Southern city. Night had fallen when they arrived. They were hardly in the house when the girl ran out and across the street to the neighboring house in which young Harris lived with his mother.

As it happened, Mrs. Harris was not at home, and Fairfield Harris, meeting the girl at the door, had at once gone back with her into the Cruger house. Cruger's voice, loud and angry, was heard after that, as though he were in some desperate quarrel. Then there was a shot. One of the police force on the street went in. He found Cruger dead.

The explanation had been brief.

Harris said that Cruger was drunk, and that the girl, in fear, had run across to his mother. He had gone back at once with her to Cruger's house. The action had angered Cruger in his drunken state, and, in his fury he was threatening to kill both Harris and the girl, when there came a knocking at the door at the far end of the drawing-room.

Cruger had gone to this door, opened it, and stepped out, closing it behind him. A moment later there was the sound of a shot, and Cruger rushed in and across the drawing-room. He fell as he approached them.

This was the meager defense that Harris made when the police entered.

He had added no word to it.

He had gone to Colonel Braxton, who came with the police and the prosecuting attorney to examine the house and take such steps as were necessary to preserve the evidence. He had added nothing, even after the Grand Jury had returned its indictment against him. And it was now apparent that in the courtroom he would add nothing to his early statement.

It was the rule of law that one charged with a crime need not testify in his own behalf, and no inference of guilt could be drawn from that refusal. What one charged with a crime said at the time and at the scene of a murder could be introduced as testimony by the State against him, but the prisoner could not be called to explain or amplify it, nor to be cross-examined on it. If at the scene of the criminal act he had possessed the foresight to keep wholly silent, the State, to convict him, must depend on other sources of evidence.

It had this little from Harris.

But it had nothing from the girl.

She had been inexplicably silent.

She had said no word, uttered no sound, when the police entered to find Cruger dead. She had stood there in the drawing-room beside Harris, motionless and silent, a tragic figure out of some bloody drama of the Book of Kings.

The prosecuting attorney built up his case carefully with his collateral evidence. Then he put the police

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officer on the stand. He established that the man was officially the Chief of Police, but, in fact, a sort of watchman who himself went about.

"Where were you on the night of the seventeenth of November?"

"In North Washington Street."

"The street of this city on which the residences of Duncan Cruger and Fairfield Harris are situated?"

"Yes — the houses are nearly opposite."

"What kind of night was it?"

"A bad night. There had been a drizzling cold rain, and about dark it began to fall heavy."

"Did you see the decedent, Duncan Cruger, and his wife that night?"

"Yes, they drove up to the house about nine o'clock. They had a hired carriage. They got out and went in. The carriage went back to the livery stable."

"Then what happened?"

"A little later — not long, maybe half an hour, maybe fifteen minutes — Mrs. Cruger rushed out of the front door and across the street to the Harris house. She didn't go in. Mr. Harris came to the door. They talked a little, and then he went back across the street into the Cruger house with her."

"What did you do?"

"I came down the street by the house. But it was raining so heavy that I went on."

"Did you hear anything as you passed the house?"

"Yes. I heard loud voices, a quarrel — I'd say a violent quarrel. But I didn't stop then; I went on down the street. I stopped farther down in the shelter of a door; there was no porch over the Cruger door."

"Why did you wait there instead of going back to your police headquarters?"

The Chief of Police hesitated.

"Well," he said, "I thought there might be trouble, and I'd better hang around."

"Exactly — and there was trouble. What happened next?"

"I heard a shot in the Cruger house. I was too far away to tell exactly where, but it was somewhere in that house. I ran up the street and into the house. The front door was not locked. There is no hall. It opens directly into the drawing-room. It's a big drawing-room, going entirely across the front of the house."

"What did you see?"

"I saw Mr. Fairfield Harris carrying Mr. Cruger. He put him down on the sofa as I came in. Mr. Cruger had been shot. He was dead. Mrs. Cruger was standing near the front door. She didn't say anything. She never said anything."

"What did Fairfield Harris say?"

"He said just what you told the jury."

"Did you believe it?"

The Chief of Police hesitated.

"No," he said.

The whole courtroom was astonished. Not at the reply, but from the fact that the attorney for the prisoner did not protest against this examination. The questions were leading, and

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this last one obviously improper. The whole inquiry contravened the most elementary rules of evidence. The judge on his own volition should have stopped it. But it was his custom to act only on objection. He permitted any course, in such a trial, that was not challenged by the defense.

And the prosecuting attorney, finding himself thus unhampered, went on: "Why didn't you believe it?"

"Well," replied the man, "I didn't believe it for the same reason that the Grand Jury didn't believe it. You see, there had been a quarrel, a shot, and here was Mr. Harris carrying the dead man to a sofa. There were only three persons in the house at the time.

"It looked this way to me: When Harris shot Cruger, the man ran across the drawing-room to get out at the door on the other side. Harris and Mrs. Cruger were between him and the front door. But he couldn't go far. The doctor said the bullet cut a big artery. Cruger fell when he got to the door that opens into the alley. Harris ran after him and carried him back to the sofa. He was putting him down on the sofa when I came in . . . That's the way I put it together."

"Did you find the pistol?"

"No — it was not in the room."

"Did you search Harris?"

The witness made an apologetic gesture.

"Well," he said, "you see, Mr. Harris was not arrested that night. He was not arrested until after the Grand Jury convened. I had to get a doctor."

"Then you did not search the prisoner for the weapon on that night?"

"No."

The prosecuting attorney, given an inch, now took a mile.

"The reason you could not find the pistol was because Harris took it away with him?"

"He either took it or —"

The witness stopped short. But every man listening in the courtroom could have finished the sentence. The allusion was to the girl, motionless beside Colonel Braxton. But the witness stopped before he named her and the prosecuting attorney brushed him past the point. He shot another query at him, formed and fitted for his assent.

"It's your theory," he said, "that Harris had a pistol with him when he went into Cruger's house. Now, Mr. Scally, tell the jury why you know that Cruger ran across the drawing-room to that far door at the other end of it, after he was shot."

The witness turned toward the jury.

"It's certain," he began, "for several reasons: In the first place, Mr. Cruger had no weapon on him. There wasn't any in the house; he was unarmed. He had no way to defend himself, and after the shot he tried to get away. He couldn't get out the front door because this prisoner was between him and that door. So, naturally, he ran in the only direction that he could get out — to the other door at the far end of the drawing-room, which opened into the alley.

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"The doctor said that while the bullet cut a big artery, the man did not die instantly; he died of hemorrhage. He died of loss of blood. He would have the strength to run that distance, as the doctor said. We've all seen it in animals. If the bullet doesn't strike the brain or spine or heart, and the animal is alarmed, it will run — it will run until it falls from loss of blood. Now, that's what happened to Mr. Cruger. He ran clear across that drawing-room after he was shot. We know that for certain."

He paused, as for a point of emphasis.

"There was a line of blood drops clear across the drawing-room from where Mr. Cruger and Harris had been standing to the door at the far end of that drawing-room where it opened out into the alley. A line of blood drops —"

He was interrupted. Colonel Braxton was looking at him. He had said no word. The only sound the defense attorney uttered was a curiously inflected "Ah!" — as from one who after long searching has chanced on the hidden thing. The exclamation of surprise. It was a queer, drawling expletive. But it seemed to single out that particular fact; to select it; to disentangle it from any other thing; to thrust it prominently before the eye; to make it the dominating factor among a mass of trivialities.

The attitude, and this exclamation of the attorney for the defense, fastened the whole attention of the court and jury on this single fact.

The prosecution marked it, and turned toward him.

"You seem to think this is important, Colonel."

The lawyer did not change his posture, but his voice when he spoke was decisive.

"I do," he said. "It is the one important clue in the whole case. It is the one decisive thing. On it, and on it alone, turns the guilt or innocence of the prisoner."

The prosecuting attorney was not disturbed by this statement. He was quite certain that he understood the thing upon which Colonel Braxton depended. He had discussed this likely theory of the defense with the Chief of Police and the surgeons. He was ready with a conclusive rebuttal to it. He was, then, willing, even anxious, to accept the decisive importance of this fact.

"That's right, Colonel," he said. "And that's the reason we took so much trouble to preserve this line of blood drops precisely as they were on the hardwood floor of Cruger's drawing-room. You helped us, Colonel. The Chief of Police went to see you that very evening to ask you how to do it."

"He did," replied Colonel Braxton. "He came to me, Alfred, like Nicodemus, in the night."

Again there was an amused murmur in the courtroom.

The prosecuting attorney endeavored to ignore it. He went about the question before him: With the aid of the police officer he took a number of

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small panes of glass out of a box on his table and laid them down, in a line, on the scrubbed oak floor of the courtroom. They extended from the jury to the judge's bench. Each blood drop as it appeared on the hardwood floor of the Cruger drawing room had been preserved for evidence by the simple device of placing one of these sheets of glass over it, tracing the outline, and copying the drop in ink.

The reproduction had been very carefully and precisely done. The exact splash and aspect of each drop was accurately copied. Each pane of glass had been numbered and designated, by the signature of the prosecuting attorney, the Chief of Police, and Colonel Braxton, so that, by placing them in line, in their numbered order, the whole line of telltale blood drops, extending from where Harris and the girl had stood to the door opening onto the alley, would be as definitely and accurately before the court as if they were looking at the floor of the drawing-room.

The prosecuting attorney now indicated the line of glass extending across the oak floor to the judge's bench.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, "you can see for yourselves the exact trail of blood drops made by Cruger as he fled from Harris's pistol to the door at the farther end of his drawing-room. Let us say that the judge's bench is where Harris stood, and the end of the line, where you gentlemen sit, is the door opening on the alley, through which the wounded man hoped to escape."

He turned to his opponent.

"Is that right, Colonel?"

"Your facts are right," replied the attorney. "The conclusion, Alfred — let us leave the conclusion to the jury."

He stood up, resting his hand on the table as though to support his big shoulders.

"I accept the challenge of that exhibit. I accept the narrow issue to which it reduces all the evidence in this case. It's a single issue. It's the simplest issue in the world: If that line of blood drops was made by a wounded man moving from the judge's bench toward the jury, then my client is guilty. If it was made by a wounded man moving from the jury to the judge's bench, then my client is innocent. . . . That is all there is to this case."

And he sat down.

The line of defense upon which Colonel Braxton depended began now to dawn upon the spectators in the courtroom, as early in the preparation of his case it had occurred to the prosecuting attorney. He did not intend to permit Colonel Braxton to spring it suddenly on the jury, with a dramatic gesture in his argument. He proposed to discount it now. And he went forward in that intention.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, "it may occur to some of you that when Harris carried Cruger back across the drawing-room to the sofa, there would have been *another* line of blood drops from the wounded man. But this would not be the case. The

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wound was in the chest, and with the body doubled up in Harris's arms, the clothing of the wounded man would have taken up the hemorrhage. It would have soaked into the clothing and consequently not dropped on the floor. I will establish this by the surgeon who examined the body, as it is a feature of the case upon which the defense will depend."

The reply of Colonel Braxton amazed the man as it amazed the courtroom: "It is not a feature of the case upon which I depend."

The prosecuting attorney swung round on his heel toward him.

"Then you admit that there would be only *one line* of blood drops?"

Colonel Braxton took his unlighted cigar out of his mouth and put it down on the table.

"Yes," he said. "If you wish, I will admit it. It is quite likely that if one were carrying such a wounded person, what you say about it would occur. The hemorrhage would be soaked up by the clothing, and not drip on the floor."

There was silence.

Even Mr. Dabney Mason, the clerk of this circuit court, accomplished in the divining of defenses, was astonished. This strange admission removed the one possible doubt in the case, the one hole in the wall through which the prisoner might escape conviction. Eliminating it, the chain of circumstantial evidence seemed complete.

The case for the State was as clear now as an open road — an open road with the gallows for the prisoner at the end of it.

Never in his experience had the prosecuting attorney had his way so easily, and so unquestioned. He had held the Chief of Police for his concluding witness. He had put on all the others, introduced all his collateral evidence, and built up his case as he pleased, with no objection from Colonel Braxton.

The defense attorney had never put a query. He had taken no exception, made no move against him. And, to make doubly sure, the prosecuting attorney had discounted in advance all defenses that it seemed possible to array against him. He had even gone to the length of bringing out, himself, the dissolute character of Cruger, his known relations with a questionable woman of the town, and the very course that the decedent had taken to end that relation: his payment of a sum of money, and his message of dismissal to her on the morning of the marriage; all this to offset the peril of an impassioned speech for the defense. And to show how Cruger, entering this marriage, had turned away from his former life — cut it clear away, irrevocably and forever for him.

And to this Colonel Braxton gave the assent of silence.

Thus, as he liked, the prosecuting attorney had made his case.

It was complete, buttressed at every point, and unassailable.

There only remained that Delphic pronouncement of Colonel Braxton, in the opening of the trial. But that,

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after all these admissions, could be only a gesture, nothing more.

The prosecuting attorney stood up with an air of victory.

He addressed the court.

"Your Honor," he said, "the State rests!"

Then he turned to his opponent.

"Now, Colonel," he added, "bring out your big hidden defense!"

Colonel Braxton had been sitting relaxed in his chair, his eyes closed, his body sagging as though devitalized, like one overcome with ennui, or in the vague borderland of sleep.

He moved now at the words, as though awakened.

"Alfred," he drawled, "are you going on like that captain of the host of Syria, looking for a *great* thing? . . . I shall not come out and stand and call on the name of the Lord against you."

Again the audience in the courtroom was diverted by this citation from the book it knew.

Then Colonel Braxton got up slowly.

"The thing that I depend on is a *small* thing. And it is, as I have stated, in the custody of the clerk of this circuit court."

He paused, as though to gather his wandering wits.

"Your Honor," he said, "there is only one fact in this case to be determined . . . one isolated fact. For this reason I have paid no attention to the mass of evidence introduced by the State. For all that evidence stands on the issue of this fact. If the issue of this fact fails, all this evidence fails with it. The whole case for the State is like an arch depending on a keystone; if the keystone crumbles, the whole arch goes to pieces."

He turned toward the jury.

"Gentlemen" he said, "the defendant is guilty and should be hanged, or he is innocent and should go free — *as you decide this one fact!*"

He indicated the line of glass laid out on the oak floor from the jury to the judge's bench.

"If that line of blood drops was made by a wounded man moving from the direction of the judge's bench toward the jury, the prisoner is guilty and his statement is false. If it was made by a wounded man moving from the direction of the jury toward the judge's bench, then the prisoner is innocent, and all the carefully built up theory of the State is false.

"For that line of glass is laid down correctly. It shows precisely the track of the wounded man across the drawing-room on that fatal night. The end toward the judge's bench is the end toward the front door of that drawing-room where Harris stood; the end toward the jury is the end toward the far door opening into the alley. In which direction was Cruger going when he made that track?"

He paused.

"When we know this, we shall know the truth about the murder."

The prosecuting attorney interrupted.

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"But how can the jury know that? How can anybody know that?"

Colonel Braxton looked down at the man as in a sort of wonder.

"Why, Alfred," he said, "it will tell itself! Every one of these blood drops is a voice crying out the truth!"

Then his body lifted and seemed to take on volume.

"It is one of the inexplicable mysteries of God that every event carries its own authenticity on its face; the truth about it is always there. We have only to look closely to know the truth. It cannot lie."

He turned toward the judge.

"And now, Your Honor, I will ask your permission to borrow an article in the custody of the circuit clerk."

There was utter silence. The jury and the people in the courtroom looked at the man in profound wonder. What was he about?

Colonel Braxton went over to the clerk's table, took up the stone bottle of red ink, crossed to the judge's bench, and, moving swiftly along the panels of glass toward the jury, spilled out a line of ink drops on the hard oak floor; then, turning, he moved swiftly back, spilling out a parallel line of drops, from the direction of the jury to the judge's bench.

"Your Honor," he said, "look how this line of blood drops cries out the truth about this murder! . . . The direction in which a wounded man is going can always be told by the appearance of the blood drops that fall as he moves. The spray or splash of the drop will tell. These spray fragments of the blood drop are always thrown forward of the drop itself. They are always carried forward of the main drop — *in the direction that the wounded man is going.*

"Look, Your Honor, at the two lines of ink drops that I have spilled out. As I moved from your bench to the jury, the spray is ahead of each drop in the direction toward the jury. As I moved from the jury toward your bench the spray is ahead of the drop in the direction toward your bench."

His voice took on weight and violence: "And so it is with the blood drops on the glass. The spray is ahead of every drop — *in the direction from the jury toward Your Honor!*"

He stood up, big, dominant. His voice filled the courtroom.

"And so we know the truth. Duncan Cruger was shot, as Fairfield Harris said, when he went out at the far door of the drawing-room to see who had knocked there; and he fled from that assassin, back across the drawing-room, fell, and was lifted by Harris onto the sofa . . ."

There was confusion. The judge came down from the bench, the jury from its chairs. The audience crowded against the rail. The evidence was clear, plain, apparent to all; established, proved, decided by this demonstration.

The girl stood up, young Harris beside her, illumined, vitalized by this swift, utter, incomparable victory. The prosecuting attorney arose, but he remained silent by his table.

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He had been thrown violently, on the instant, and without warning. And he was confused and puzzled.

If Harris had not killed Cruger, who had killed him?

That mystery remained.

But it did not remain forever. In time, its explanation arrived — but not in time to have saved Colonel Braxton's client from the gallows. A year later, the woman of the town whom the decedent had paid off and dismissed on the day of his marriage died in a hospital of the city. At the end, when death was on her, she confessed the truth. She had returned, in the night, in the rain, to the alley behind the house, knocked on the door to the drawing-room, and when the man opened it, she shot him. And in a manner she died with the man, for from the cold and rain she contracted pneumonia that, in the end, removed her out of life.

FOR MYSTERY FANS — these swiftly-paced mystery-thrillers are now on sale at your newsstand:

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Lyle G. Boyd's "The Tools of Magic" is one of the twenty-two "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Eleventh Annual Contest. It is an interesting tale in a professorial sort of way, containing such fascinating elements as lucky coins and gems, rabbit's feet, Friday the 13th, garlic buds, mandrake roots — and, yes, black cats. Are you superstitious? Well, superstition, according to Professor Brimmer, is just a name for something that works for other people but not for you — or, to put it another way, still quoting the professor of sociology, superstition is only what other people believe in and you don't — or so the Professor says . . .

The author, Lyle G. Boyd, wants no misunderstanding about the first name. In this particular instance, Lyle is the first name of a "Mrs." — not of a "Mr." Mrs. Boyd first realized that she had been given a confusing first name on the day she entered high school, when she was assigned a place in the Boys' Locker Room; the authorities quickly corrected their mistake, but the incident was the forerunner of many embarrassing situations.

At the time Mrs. Boyd wrote "The Tools of Magic" she had been married long enough to have a daughter in college (that is all she would say about her age). Her husband is Professor of Immunochemistry at the Boston University School of Medicine. Husband and wife have collaborated in research and have published quite a few scientific papers together — for example, "Blood Grouping Tests on 300 Mummies, With Notes on the Precipitin-Test" — but "The Tools of Magic" is Mrs. Boyd's "first attempt at a mystery story." Can we expect the creation of a new doctor detective or scientific sleuth? We hope so.

THE TOOLS OF MAGIC

by LYLE G. BOYD

IT WAS DIFFICULT TO PREPARE A lecture on sociology, thought Professor Brimmer, when your eyes were on Pareto but your mind was on murder.

It was a quiet Monday evening in May, and except for the breeze blowing the curtains at the open window of the living room, and the snarl of a cat strolling through the yard outside, it was little different from all the quiet evenings of the past weeks in which

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Professor Brimmer sat listening to the ticking of the mantel clock, the click of Mrs. Brimmer's knitting needles, and the pounding of his own heart as he thought about murder.

The clack of the knitting needles suddenly stopped.

"Bother!" said Esmeralda Brimmer. "I've just realized that next Friday is the thirteenth. I suppose I'd better not go."

Professor Brimmer's spirit did a nose dive, but he didn't look up from his book.

"Better not go where?" he said.

"You know very well where, John! To New York to meet Aunt Jane's plane and to put her on her ship for Europe."

Professor Brimmer did know very well where. He had been counting on that Friday night ever since they got Aunt Jane's letter; it might be his only chance for a long while, perhaps his last chance, to prevent a murder. His *own* murder.

Mrs. Brimmer was tired of him. He had known that for several months now, and much as it had alarmed him, the knowledge did not really surprise him. He knew very well the weak, uninspiring exterior he presented to the world. As professor of sociology, he was entitled to a certain respect, but no academic rank could make him a youth again. He was undeniably a man on the wrong side of 50, with a perceptibly rounding paunch, gray hair so thin that it barely covered his pink scalp, and pale blue eyes which, without his spectacles, saw the world as a gray blur. What did surprise him was that Esmeralda should prefer in his place the loud-voiced, shaggy-haired Professor Lane of Mathematics. It was because of Lane that she had been trying her hand at murder.

To escape Mrs. Brimmer by divorce was out of the question, unfortunately; a small sectarian New England college frowns on divorce among its faculty. It would frown on murder, too — if it knew — but obviously it was Esmeralda's intention to evolve a foolproof scheme to dispose of her husband, a method which would leave her free, without embarrassing Professor Lane.

Sighing, Professor Brimmer turned a page. He was a kindly man, and it was only after months of thought, and the evasion of several attempts on his life, that he had reluctantly concluded that he could achieve safety only by disposing of Esmeralda before she disposed of him, and in so clever a way that he would not be deprived either of his liberty or his professorship.

His plan was complete now, but it could not be carried out just any time; it depended on Mrs. Brimmer's taking a journey — an overnight journey to New York, for instance, to meet Aunt Jane.

Professor Brimmer stole a look at his wife over the top of *The Mind and Society*. On the wall above her head hung a photograph of Esmeralda at nineteen and, looking at it, he regretted more than ever the necessity

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which faced him. But it was hardly fair of her, he thought resentfully, to want to discard him just because he had grown older, when she herself had changed so greatly from the diffident, slender sprite in the picture. Now, fifteen years older and 40 pounds heavier, she had metamorphosed: her shy brown eyes had acquired a commanding glint, her silken brown hair had coalesced into a stiff brush of tight curls, and her mouth was uncompromising, flat, and garishly red. What kind of sorcery was it, he wondered, that could turn a woman from elf to behemoth in a mere fifteen years? And what blacker sorcery could make her seem desirable in the eyes of Professor Lane?

"John!" said Mrs. Brimmer. "You're not listening to a word I'm saying."

Putting his finger in the book to mark his place, he looked up and blinked from behind his glasses.

"I'm sorry, my dear. I'm afraid I was absorbed in Pareto."

"He's outmoded," she said firmly.

"I know, but he's the subject of tomorrow's lecture, and he has a most interesting section on non-logical conduct. Did you know, for example, that in medieval Europe it was believed that to stop a destructive hailstorm one had only to throw three hailstones into the fire, while pronouncing the name of the Trinity?"

"I'm not at all interested in non-logical conduct at the moment, John, and I wish you'd pay attention when I speak. I was saying that I've just realized that next Friday is the thirteenth, and I'm certainly not going to travel even the short distance to New York on such an unlucky day. But if I don't leave until Saturday it hardly seems worth making the trip at all, does it?"

"It seems a pity to disappoint Aunt Jane," said Professor Brimmer vaguely. "Why is it you say you can't go?"

"Because of Friday the thirteenth. Nobody could call me a superstitious woman, as you very well know. Still, you have to admit funny things do happen, and I never did approve of being reckless. Though why that unlucky day had to turn up at the very time I was planning a trip is beyond me."

"A pity," said Professor Brimmer, and returned to his book. The important thing at the moment, he knew, was to be noncommittal. He must not argue, he must not urge her; he must simply, with the greatest subtlety, persuade her that it was not necessary to deny herself the trip.

The only question was: how?

She was knitting again, frowning in thought, and he knew he must divert her attention, immediately before she had made up her mind.

"Did you know," he said, looking up amiably, "that according to Pliny, the ancient Roman, if one pronounces the number *duo* — that is, two — at sight of a scorpion, the scorpion stops and does not sting? Or that

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among the various items supposed to bring good luck to the wearer, in addition to the rabbit's foot and lucky coins used by the lower stratum of our own society, people of other lands have had considerable success with various gems — such as the star sapphire to avert accident, jade to prevent kidney disease, amethyst to ward off drunkenness, and blue beads to nullify the effects of the evil eye? We find charms even in the vegetable kingdom — buds of garlic to keep away witches, the mandrake root, immortalized by the poet Donne, to resist enchantment —"

But Mrs. Brimmer was putting her knitting away, and yawning.

"Rank superstition," she said scornfully. "I'm surprised at your presenting such nonsense to your students."

"They seem to enjoy it," he said, watching her turn out her lamp. "And I'm always careful to tell them at the beginning of the lecture that while I cannot myself vouch for the efficacy of all these items, they are nevertheless widely esteemed; and that, after all, superstition is only what other people believe in, and you don't. My students always laugh most appreciatively."

"Garlic buds!" said Mrs. Brimmer witheringly as she started up the stairs. "Mandrake roots! Nonsense!"

Professor Brimmer sighed and closed his book, thankful that his diversionist tactics had worked so well.

Methodically he packed his briefcase and checked his appointment list for tomorrow. His first lecture was at 10; he must visit the Museum not later than 9:30 to select the exhibits he needed; a grade conference at one; then a graduate seminar, and he would be free for the day.

All was now quiet upstairs. Silently Professor Brimmer unlocked the bottom drawer of his desk and took out a little traveling clock in a blue-leather case which had cost him several hours of shopping last week. It had not been easy to find an exact duplicate of the clock Esmeralda always carried with her on a journey — the leather cases were slightly different; but once he had exchanged new case for old, there would be nothing to excite her suspicion.

Whistling a melancholy tune, he opened the clock and attached to the works the lethal cylinder he had constructed. After all his care to devise a mechanism which would release its fatal gas only when Mrs. Brimmer was asleep and alone in her hotel room, and which would then obliterate all traces of itself, it was discouraging to think that she might not go to New York at all.

But Professor Brimmer was essentially an optimistic man, and he had little doubt that he would — if he himself survived the night — persuade his wife to ignore the menace of Friday the thirteenth and to meet Aunt Jane as planned.

Yawning, he closed the clock, snapped it in its case, and locked it away in his desk.

It was nearly midnight now. He

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went to the kitchen where his thermos of warm milk waited for him on the table beside his flashlight. Quietly he poured the milk into the sink, smiling as he remembered that week in February when it had been spiked with arsenic five nights in a row. He rinsed the thermos and after a last look around he turned off the lights, switched on his flashlight, and started softly up the stairs.

He was halfway up when he stopped abruptly. For a fraction of a second he had glimpsed something shining on the third step from the top.

That was the step with the frayed carpet which he had asked Esmeralda at least a dozen times to have repaired. Bending over to inspect it in the light of his flash, he discovered a black silken thread stretched tight across the step at the height of a man's ankle; judging from its strength when he plucked at it, it was made of the most formidable nylon.

Always something new to have to watch out for! he thought with annoyance as he carefully stepped over it and went on to the bedroom. Well, Esmeralda was an early riser; doubtless the thread would be gone in the morning.

He glanced at her bed. She seemed to be sound asleep, but he was careful to make no noise as he climbed into his own bed and deftly unplugged the electric blanket. Remembering the time in March when it had caught fire on the very night when Esmeralda was away at a Woman's Club convention, he nudged the blanket to the side of the bed and helped it slide to the floor. He tucked the remaining covers around him and, still searching for an argument that would send Esmeralda to New York in spite of Friday the thirteenth, he fell uneasily asleep . . .

Shortly before dawn he woke, suddenly. The room was silent, and through the open window came only the scent of lilacs. Then the quiet was shattered by the yowl of a cat whose song soared and diminished in agonizing waves.

Professor Brimmer tiptoed to the window and leaned out, trying to locate the sound precisely.

"Damn that cat!" said Mrs. Brimmer, behind him.

Hastily he stepped back from the window.

"I would hardly go so far as that," he said, "but it might at least go home to its own neighborhood. It sounds as though it's right next door."

"It is. It belongs there. Our neighbors bought it a couple of days ago, a great black thing they call Beelzy, and I suppose it will be making the nights unbearable all summer."

"Beelzy?" said Professor Brimmer. "Then he must be very black indeed. Tomorrow, perhaps you might ask our neighbors to keep Beelzy shut up at night — tell them we disapprove of black cats."

"Don't be silly, John! Do you suppose I want them to think I'm superstitious?"

He was too tired to be tactful.

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"As I've told you before," he said wearily, "superstition is just a name for something that works for other people but not for you. You never walk under ladders, I've noticed, and when I sneeze you always say *Gesundheit*. Do you really think that saying *Gesundheit* to a sneeze will ward off a cold?"

"How many colds have you had this past winter? None! And I've noticed when you spill the salt at breakfast you never forget to toss a few grains over your left shoulder!"

He opened his mouth, then closed it abruptly. It was extremely stupid of him to annoy her at this time when he should be placating her, and at all costs he must get her into a good humor by tomorrow.

"I apologize, my dear," he said. "I have some foolish habits, I suppose. But of course we can't have the neighbors thinking you are superstitious; you may tell them that *I* am afraid of Beelzy."

"I'll do nothing of the sort! To be afraid of black cats is utterly ridiculous. There must be millions of black cats in the world, and every rational person knows that if they all brought bad luck we'd be nothing but a race of cripples."

"Quite right, my dear," he murmured meekly. "I defer to your judgment. We'll just forget about it."

His heart was beating fast as he listened to the rustle of her covers as she got back into her bed. He had just had an idea. Lying there in the darkness, he smiled.

In spite of her little faults, Esmeralda was an intelligent woman, and except in certain areas, her actions were almost frighteningly rational. She was, in fact, proud of her superior intellect.

Her remark about the millions of black cats had been, for him, an illumination. The way to tackle Esmeralda was to entice her, under proper guidance, to exercise her logical faculty.

Tuesday was a satisfying day.

Professor Brimmer visited the museum to obtain his exhibits and gave his lecture; made an unscheduled stop in the library reference room; and, after an early lunch at the Commons, where he and Professor Lane met before the salad counter and bowed politely to each other, he attended the grade conference, met his seminar, and reached home about five, as usual.

Esmeralda was in the yard, weeding the flower bed, and he did not interrupt her. After dropping his briefcase in the living room, he went upstairs, taking care not to stumble on the frayed carpet on the third step from the top. As he dried himself after his shower, the balmy spring air blowing through the window made him long for gayer clothes, and on impulse he opened the bottom drawer of his bureau, where his summer things were kept, to hunt for a flowered sport shirt.

"Heavens!" said Professor Brimmer, as his hand jerked back with

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pain. He stared in surprise at the minute drops of blood emerging from several shallow punctures in the palm of his hand, then knelt down to examine the contents of the drawer.

Underneath the stacks of folded clothes, in the rear left-hand corner, swathed in a concealing handkerchief, lay a small wax effigy of a man; thin hair and spectacles had been inked on the head, and the body was liberally transfixed with sharp steel needles.

It was difficult not to laugh out loud. Professor Brimmer did not permit himself even a smile as he rewrapped the image in its handkerchief and gently returned it to its corner, steel points and all. That particular method of attempting murder was one he had no fear of, but, as a scholar, he was amazed that this ancient belief in effigies should still have any vitality. If Esmeralda had been delving among his old books, she must be getting desperate — or perhaps merely impatient.

Whistling softly, he put on his flowered sport shirt and slippers and went down to the living room where, with the evening paper on his lap, he planned the evening's strategy.

It would be fatal to let Esmeralda guess that he *wanted* her to go to New York; therefore he must not seem nervous, he must not fumble for words. On the other hand, he must not be so glib and unprofessorial as to make her suspicious. Subtlety — that must be his keynote.

At supper they were politely silent, as usual, and when they went into the living room and Esmeralda got out her knitting, the evening had started out to be any quiet Tuesday evening in May.

It was at this point that Professor Brimmer broke the routine. Instead of sitting down with a book, he opened his briefcase and took out a number of objects wrapped in tissue paper. He placed the objects on his desk.

As he had hoped, they caught Esmeralda's attention at once.

"What in the world have you there, John?"

"Just the exhibits I used in today's lecture," he said. "Before returning them to the Museum, I thought I'd check to make sure I hadn't mislaid any of them. Some of these pieces are rare and quite valuable."

"That junk?" she said scornfully. But she leaned over to watch as he laid them on the table: a piece of turquoise, a string of blue beads made of glazed pottery, a cowry shell, a rabbit's foot, a forked and wrinkled mandrake root, a crumbling paper crisscrossed with the red and black patterns of a magic square.

"It all depends on the point of view, my dear," he said. "To you and many other intelligent people this is all junk; to the credulous they are the tools of magic; and to the scholar they are evidence of man's tendency to non-logical conduct. Hardly anyone in the Arab world, for instance, would dream of taking even the shortest journey without the protec-

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tion of a loop of these blue beads, which they attach to all vehicles from donkeys and camels to taxicabs."

"That reminds me," said Mrs. Brimmer. "About meeting Aunt Jane on Friday —"

"A case in point," interrupted Professor Brimmer, his heart beginning to thud. "The attitude of the untutored towards Friday the thirteenth, for example. Incredible that anyone should take the date so seriously, as though the stars in their courses had conspired to create an especially unlucky day!"

"Anyone who knows me knows that I'm not a bit superstitious," said Mrs. Brimmer, looking annoyed, "but some things do happen that can't be explained, and when Friday the thirteenth suddenly turns up out of the blue, I believe in being careful."

"Actually," said Professor Brimmer thoughtfully, "that is exactly what it does not do. Turn up out of the blue, I mean. Friday the thirteenth is no rarer than any other combination of day-of-the-week and day-of-the-month, and why the newspapers should get so excited about it and run black headlines every time it occurs, I can't understand. To listen to the talk of the man-in-the-street, you'd think it was as rare and portentous as an eclipse of the sun, or a conjunction of the Earth with Mars. And yet, Friday the thirteenth is the most commonplace of events, as any logical person knows."

"Commonplace?" said Mrs. Brimmer, frowning. As he had hoped, she was looking irritated at being classed, even by implication, with the untutored man-in-the-street. "How can you call it commonplace, when everyone knows —"

"What everyone knows is not necessarily so, as a woman of your intelligence realizes perfectly well," said Professor Brimmer. "People talk about Friday the thirteenth as though it were an act of God or the caprice of a demon, when actually, of course, it is a well-regulated, completely predictable phenomenon which occurs on schedule with utter regularity. It is simply the mathematical consequence of the way our calendar is constructed."

"Are you sure?" said Mrs. Brimmer doubtfully.

"Shall I explain? Let me get paper and pencil so we can construct a chart. Now! There are three hundred and sixty-five days in the average year — or fifty-two weeks. That means roughly fifty-two Fridays, and Friday's date may be anything from the first to the thirty-first. By the laws of chance, then, there ought to be more than one, but not quite two, Friday the thirteenths in any given year. But since it is not chance that operates, but the laws of our peculiar calendar, and since we have to consider Leap Year in our calculations —"

Moaning, Mrs. Brimmer put her hand to her head. "You make my head ache, John. You surely don't expect me to follow such involved

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mathematics? Can't you make it simpler?"

"Certainly. Let's get at it this way. There are only seven different days of the week that a year can begin on. New Year's Day can be any one of the seven days of the week. That determines what month, and how many months, will have a Friday the thirteenth, and if you'll think about it, the fact is obvious."

"Please, John! You go ahead and work out your chart, and just tell me what it means when you get through."

Professor Brimmer worked for a time in silence interrupted only by the click of knitting needles and the howling of the cat next door. At last he looked up.

"Here you are, my dear. This chart summarizes the situation neatly, I think. This coming Friday will be Friday, May thirteenth, 1955. This year that is the only such juxtaposition which will occur. Last year there was one, next year there will be two, and the maximum number in any given year is three. There is *no* year without at least one, and when it appears in a February of a non-Leap Year, as it did in 1953 and will again in 1959, it will also infallibly appear in March and November of that year as well. You see how simple that is, and how commonplace?"

"You make it sound as ordinary as — as Hallowe'en or Christmas!"

"Of course. More so, even. Nothing remarkable about its occurrence at all."

As she studied the chart, Mrs. Brimmer began to look more amiable. "You *are* clever sometimes, John. And yet, I wonder why people always make such a fuss about —"

"About something that occurs with such frequency and regularity? I wonder, too. But then, not everyone is as level-headed as you, or reasons with such clarity."

Yawning, he began to rewrap the mandrake root. "I must take care of these pieces and then time for bed, I think. Are you coming?"

"Presently. First I must write to Aunt Jane and tell her I'll meet her on Friday."

"You mean you've decided to go?"

"Certainly I'm going! Why shouldn't I?"

Professor Brimmer smiled meekly, and reached for the cowry shell.

If Wednesday and Thursday seemed long, Friday morning seemed endless as Professor Brimmer went through his lectures. He was too excited to swallow his luncheon sandwich, and after a few sips of black coffee he hurried home to get ready to take Mrs. Brimmer to the station. She was to catch the 3:25 train to New York and, with luck, she would never come home again.

He opened the front door, stepped softly into the hall, and listened. He could hear only the sound of the shower bath upstairs, and he saw that Esmeralda's hat box and overnight bag stood by the door, waiting to be carried to the car.

He had rehearsed this scene in his

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mind so many times that his actions were now almost automatic. Without hesitation, he picked up the overnight bag, carried it into the living room, put it on his desk, and opened it. Her traveling clock was in the right-hand pocket, just where she always carried it. Then, after he had unlocked the bottom drawer of his desk and taken out the other clock from which he expected so much, it was the work of only a moment to exchange the two. He inserted the new clock into the old leather case, wound the works and set the timing mechanism, then put it back in the bag, and returned the bag to its place by the door.

"I'm home, my dear!" he called up the stairs, and then settled down with a magazine, to wait.

To his amazement, he began to tremble, and, after a prodigious sigh, he realized that he had been holding his breath. He slumped in his chair, trying deliberately to relax, and picked up his magazine again; but the printed letters seemed to have no meaning. His whole mind and body was occupied with listening.

He could hear Esmeralda walking across the bedroom; now she would be zipping up her girdle; now she would be tying her shoes; that clicking sound meant she had finished her hair and had put the brush down on the glass-topped dressing table. She seemed to be taking forever, but when he glanced at his watch it was only half-past 2. His watch must have stopped, he thought, but a glance at the mantel clock confirmed the time.

Suddenly the sound of his beating heart was louder than the ticking of the mantel clock, and he began sweating. He flung the magazine to the floor, and as he continued to wait, his eyes wandered from one object to another, restlessly.

There was Esmeralda's knitting bag, lying on the sofa, perhaps never to be opened again. There were the table and the chairs, never to be dusted again by her. There was the photograph as she looked at nineteen, a wisp of a girl in a hat with pink roses.

Remembering the past, Professor Brimmer swallowed hard.

Suddenly he was overwhelmed with shame. What was he doing, thinking of murder? Murder was not the act of a scholar, it was the act of a monster. Could he really live contentedly the rest of his life, knowing himself to be a monster?

No, he thought sadly, it was no use. He was made of the wrong material. Every man must live by his own ethical standards, and while some modes of action were acceptable to him, others were impossible. Much better to keep his self-respect, and let Nature take its course.

Without the intervention of a miracle, he well knew, his own future would be short, for Esmeralda was a clever woman and sooner or later she would manage to kill him. But it was wiser to take a chance on surviving whatever booby trap she might

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have prepared for him during her absence than to usurp the privilege of Atropos.

Wearily, Professor Brimmer bent to retrieve the innocent clock from his desk, went back into the hall, made the exchange, and after disconnecting the mechanism locked the lethal device in his desk.

"John!" came the peremptory voice from upstairs. "Why are you dawdling this way? Come get my dressing case at once!"

For an angry instant he regretted his decision; then slowly he climbed the stairs and picked up the dressing case, trying to avoid seeing Esmeralda's grim face in the mirror as she settled her hat on her head.

"What are you waiting for, John? Do you want me to be late?"

Dutifully he descended the stairs, and waited. He heard her at the bedroom door, then her brief exclamation. "Heavens! It's nearly three already . . . My gloves!"

Then the hurried clatter of her heels as she ran back into the bedroom, again into the hall, and started down the stairs.

On the third step from the top she caught her heel in the frayed carpet and fell headlong, screaming.

"My leg!" shrieked Mrs. Brimmer. "I've broken my leg!"

Professor Brimmer firmly refused to think, as he went to the telephone. While he waited for the ambulance, he bent over her and made soothing noises, but Esmeralda no longer heard him. When the men arrived with the stretcher he waited anxiously while the intern knelt to examine her.

He looked up at Professor Brimmer with a grave face. "It's not just her leg," he murmured. "She's broken her neck, too. She'll never live to make the hospital."

With sober face and downcast eyes he walked beside Esmeralda's stretcher as they carried it down the walk.

Suddenly she opened her eyes.

"What a liar you are, John!" Weak as her voice was, it still contained its customary note of scorn. "Either a liar or a very stupid man. I hope you realize this is all your fault. You told me that Friday the thirteenth wasn't unlucky — but look what's happened to me!"

"But that isn't what I said at all, my dear," he protested, his voice gentle as ever. "I am an honorable man and, I hope, a scholar. It is true that I explained to you what is an undeniable fact — that the juxtaposition of day and date on Friday the thirteenth is a regular and predictable occurrence. But I *never* asserted that it was not an unlucky day!"

The attendants were lifting the stretcher into the ambulance, now.

"But why isn't it unlucky for you, too?" she whispered. "Why hasn't something happened to you?"

"Was the lady superstitious?" asked the attendant as he closed the doors and walked round to the driving seat.

"Yes. Yes, she . . . was."

The attendant shook his head

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wonderingly. "Funny, the things people will believe. Well, I suppose it's accidents like this that give Friday the thirteenth a bad name, but I never took any stock in it, myself. You coming with us, Professor?"

"No. No, I'll follow in my own car."

As he watched the ambulance drive away with its siren shrieking, Professor Brimmer's face was grave but his heart was singing with the knowledge that never again would he have to worry about murder, his own or Esmeralda's. He locked the front door, smoothed his hair, and started down the driveway toward the garage.

A rustling in the lilac bushes made him look down. There, strutting majestically into the driveway, about to cross in front of him, was a jet-black cat that could only be the monstrous Beelzy!

Shuddering, moving swiftly before Beelzy should complete the transit of his path, Professor Brimmer scooped the cat up and deposited it gently in the bushes.

Sighing with relief, he then strode on towards the car. How thankful he was now that he had not burdened his conscience with murder. How much wiser it had been to depend on Nature taking its course!

Reaching into his pocket he brought out, along with his keys, a small tissue-paper package.

Smiling, he put back in his pocket the firm, knobby object he had carried on his person all day: the mandrake root, which warded off evil.

He mustn't forget to return it to the Museum — tomorrow.

ONCE AGAIN . . .

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Ron Stevens's "King of the Meat Cleavers" is one of the twenty-two "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Eleventh Annual Contest. It is a true Gallic-type story, with gusto and charm, and with that final incisive cut that so many French tales spring on the reader in the last sentence. . . . At the time he wrote this first story, Ron Stevens was twenty-four and unmarried. He started writing while in the Army — mostly, he told us, "off-beat short stories and a few radio scripts — but no sales." For the past few years Mr. Stevens has operated his own pet shop and kennel, and is especially interested in training dogs for obedience and guard work. His hobbies? They reveal much of the man: riding, skin-diving, bowling, and amateur magic. . . . And how about a detective story, Mr. Stevens, in which a trained dog plays an important role? Why not try it?

KING OF THE MEAT CLEAVERS

by RON STEVENS

"YOU TALK OF MURDER, M'SIEUR, OF the perfect crime. I am amused." Fabre spoke softly, his nasal voice somewhat mellowed by the cognac he had been drinking all evening. I stared across the second-class railway coach at the wizened little Frenchman, my companion on the Marseille-Bordeaux journey.

"I fail to see the humor in violence, Fabre."

"And that, M'sieur, is where we differ." Fabre smiled, politely, and offered me his flask. I declined.

"M'sieur does not drink? A most commendable virtue. However . . ." here he paused to drink deeply, "however, a virtue shared by few Frenchmen. We tend to see things rather differently from you Americans."

"Such things as crime, Fabre?" I prompted.

"Oui, M'sieur . . . such things as crime." Fabre looked at his pocket watch, an enormous timepiece for so small a man. "We are but a few minutes from Bordeaux. If M'sieur wishes, I shall tell of a case in point."

I nodded agreement and settled back in my seat.

"The incident to which I refer came about some fifteen years ago, M'sieur. While it attracted but little

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attention from the press, I was quite familiar with the participants. I was, you might say, a friend of the family.

"Picture, if you will, a shabby little theatre in St. Etienne. Each night, among the various acts of vaudeville appearing on stage, we find that of Alphonse and his young Italian wife, Lita.

"Although forced to perform in relative obscurity, the presentation of Alphonse and Lita bore certain marks of savoir-faire. Alphonse, a rather talented knife-thrower by trade, had only recently changed his repertoire to include meat cleavers. The beautiful Lita would stand some thirty paces from her husband, pose against a wooden backdrop, and flirt with the men in the audience. This would appear to enrage Alphonse. He would then proceed to throw knives — long sharp knives — at Lita. At least a score of knives, M'sieur.

"The glittering circle of steel but an inch from her body, Lita would turn her attention from the audience to her husband. Laughing scornfully, her taunts would bring color to the face of Alphonse. His lack of stature — he was, indeed, a small man — his inability to provide luxuries for Lita, his shortcomings as a husband — all these deficiencies would be aired, to the vast delight of the viewers. And as Lita made each point, a meat cleaver would come hurtling across the stage, to land even closer to her than the knives.

"Now, the climax of the act — after all but one of the cleavers had been thrown — was this. Lita would fling a final insult, Alphonse would take careful aim with the last meat cleaver — and down would come the curtain. There would be a short pause and then a horrible scream would rend the air. Another pause. The curtain would then ascend — to find Alphonse, the last cleaver still in his hand, passionately embracing his wife. They would then separate, bow to the audience, and the act was over.

"Night after night they did this, M'sieur — always the same routine. Really a most devoted couple, Alphonse and Lita."

Fabre reached for his cognac, drank at length, then sat silent.

"But what has all this to do with the perfect crime?" I asked.

Fabre smiled. "I am coming to that, M'sieur — all in good time. Now that I have — how you say? — set the scene, let us proceed with the action.

"It is really a simple story, M'sieur — one that has occurred many times, although not precisely in these circumstances. After perhaps the third or fourth week of their engagement in St. Etienne, Alphonse began to notice something different in the act. Lita was directing all her flirtation at one particular section of the theatre. What was even more disconcerting, at one particular member of the audience. And always the same man — a tall, handsome Italian, most powerfully built. In other words, a man just the opposite of Alphonse.

"It wasn't long before Lita's atti-

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tude towards her husband began to change. She, who had been so affectionate and attentive in private life, began to carry the taunts of the performance into their dressing-room. Little things, at first. A word — a phrase spoken half in jest — but with malicious undertones.

"Alphonse, you understand, was no fool. Blind with love for Lita, perhaps, but not totally insensitive. He realized the meaning of her frequent absences from their hotel room, her 'shopping trips' in St. Etienne, her long walks in the evenings. But Alphonse said nothing.

"Things might have remained that way indefinitely, M'sieur, had not the Italian grown impatient and confronted Alphonse and Lita in their dressing-room, just after a late performance.

"Mario Barbarelli was a man of few words, and he said them. He wanted the beautiful Lita. Having both a sizable inheritance and considerable talent as an artist, he was accustomed to getting what he wanted.

"Confronted by her husband and her lover, Lita did not hesitate in her choice. Mario would paint her, not throw knives at her. As his wife and model, Lita would have wealth, recognition, happiness. Alphonse must give her her freedom.

"Desperately, Alphonse begged for one more week's time. If, after next Saturday night's performance, Lita and Mario were still insistent, he would agree to a divorce. But during that week Mario was not to see Lita, not even to attend the theatre. This was little enough for a husband to ask, under the circumstances.

"Reluctantly, Lita and Mario agreed to those conditions. That night, for the first time since their marriage, Alphonse and his wife occupied separate hotel rooms.

"The week passed only too quickly, M'sieur. Each evening, Alphonse and Lita would go through their paces. But somehow the old insults, the humorous banter, seemed empty. Although the audience was aware that something was missing, nevertheless they did not feel cheated. Never before did the knives land so close to Lita's lovely form — never before did Alphonse's meat cleavers seem so dangerous. And when the curtain would rise, after that horrible scream, and show Alphonse embracing Lita, the sigh of relief from the audience was tremendous.

"The final Saturday night's performance was a fitting climax to a grand career. Just before going on stage, Alphonse asked his wife her decision. Lita laughed and pointed to the audience. Mario sat in the third row, center, with a large bouquet of roses in his lap . . .

"Well, M'sieur, the police called it an accident — a most regrettable accident, but nothing more. Of course, there was a small investigation. However, nothing criminal was proved."

Fabre smiled at me, an odd look in his eyes. He drank the last of the cognac.

"You mean . . ."

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"Precisely, M'sieur. That night Alphonse *threw* the last meat cleaver. This time he did not miss."

I was shocked. "You mean to say that Alphonse got away with this, Fabre? I can hardly believe it!"

Fabre nodded. "And now, M'sieur, to change the subject, I see that our train is pulling into Bordeaux. I insist you join us for supper. My wife, I see her waiting for me on the station platform. We will be honored, M'sieur."

Madame Fabre was a most attractive woman, somewhat younger than her husband. As I sat across from her that evening, I could not decide what fascinated me the more — the charming Italian accent that she had or the left ear she had not.

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EDITORS FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **WILLIAM LINDSAY GRESHAM**

TITLE: ***Don't Believe a Word She Says***

TYPE: Private Eye à la **Black Mask**

DETECTIVE: Doug Campbell

COMMENTS: *A hard, tough, slangy yarn, brisk as an ice-cold shower, and the fastest reading in many a moon. About a skinny, eleven-year-old girl who had "too much imagination" — she heard voices; and about the Devil's Looking Glass.*

I PARKED THE OLD CHEVVY IN THE driveway, went around to the tradesmen's door at the side of the house, and rang. The woman who opened it looked like one of the Furies: in a white Hoover apron, red-faced and tall enough to look me straight in the eye, which she did. You could cut her brogue with a buzz-saw. "In with ye, and don't be fidgetin' wid yer cap. Herself don't like shilly-shallying. Sit down in the sun porch and kape that grin off yer face if ye want the job."

I gathered she was the cook. The lady of the house came in after twenty minutes and I jumped up and stood at attention.

She was thirtyish, dressed in a pair of brown slacks cut high in the waist. They rippled when she walked. Her face was the kind you'd expect to find under a tawny long bob that had been brushed until it had a soft polish. She took the card from the employment agency I handed her and after merely glancing at my name, threw it on the table.

"Ever been in private service before, Campbell?" The voice was husky and had that frank, no-nonsense quality that all the dames were wearing that year. The eyes were gray.

"Two years, madam. Before that I drove commercial. And did repair work. I can get tools if you don't have them."

The gray eyes had started with my shoes and slid over the Oxford gray suit. I saw them shift as they measured my shoulders. Then they gave my face the business. I had her pegged by this time and although I kept a

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dead pan I let just a glimmer of mischief get into my eyes. She took a flat cigarette case from the pocket of her jacket, stuck a cigarette in her mouth, and touched a gold lighter to it.

"How are your nerves?"

I let this sink in for a minute and then said, "That's a hard one to answer, madam. I guess I'm as steady as the next one."

She ran one hand, nails painted so dark they were almost black, under a plume of hair and spoke from around the cigarette. "I didn't mean on the road, Campbell. We aren't a restful household. My daughter, Carol, is a very highstrung child. I'm afraid she has us all on edge. Don't let her annoy you. And don't believe a word she says. She has too much imagination."

"I think I understand, madam."

"The hell you do, brother. Wait till you're here a week. When can you start?"

I had all my stuff with me and told her so. She took me back and turned me over to Nora Flannery, the battle-ax who had let me in.

When the boss had gone Nora looked at me as if she were picking out a good spot to shove a carving knife into. Then she said, "Have ye had lunch? Niver mind — a man as big as yourself can always eat," and she started laying out a cold lunch that would have kept some of the folks over in Europe for a month. Right in the middle of pouring me a cup of java Flannery stopped and gave me the gimlet stare. "Are ye sober?"

"Like a judge."

"Ye'r lyin'."

"You'll never catch me with an edge on."

"Sure and ye spoke the truth that time, me boy." She held a fist like a battering ram five inches from my nose. "I'll have no arguments in this house, Campbell. Keep yer nose clean and ye won't die of overwork around here. And ye can have my room — the one over Miss Carol's. Faith, that kid scraymin' night after night has got me beat. I hope you're a sound sleeper."

The kitchen door moved inward and a tall man stood on the threshold. He was about 60, with white hair and a white mustache, and was dressed in a slack suit. He stepped forward and stretched out his hand. "I'm John Frobisher. You've met my daughter, Myrna, I believe. And you're the new chauffeur." His handclasp was firm and his blue eyes steady. "I hope you like it here, Campbell. We've . . . frankly, we've had a little trouble keeping help. Nothing to it . . . ridiculous business, really. It's my granddaughter, little Carol. Nervous child. But a sweet kid. If she bothers you too much let me know."

He smiled once and went out. I wanted to see the kid everybody was talking about and this didn't take long. There was a noise from the pantry and Flannery plunged in, coming out with a slim, dark-haired girl of eleven firmly by the arm.

"And why must you always be stealin' from me pantry? Since when

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have ye had to go thievin'? Why don't ye ask me for cookies?"

The kid's eyes were like saucers. She shook herself free and her head jerked to the left, the shoulder jerking up at the same time. This motion was repeated three times, then she tapped three times with her right foot and came over to me.

"You're new here. You're to drive for us. I know all about you. You're not more nervous than the next one. You drove private for two years and before that commercial. Only you should have said commercial*ly* because an adjective can't modify a verb. I heard everything. I was hiding around the door. When I grow up I'm going to be a detective and solve murders. Have you ever seen a dead body? I mean one that had been murdered? Have you ever seen an ax victim?"

I stood up, at attention. "I know a number of guys on the cops, Miss Carol. Only you wouldn't be interested in any dead ones. There's nothing to see, really. There's nothing so harmless and peaceful as a corpse."

Flannery had handed her two cookies and then pushed her out the door. "I hope yer nerves are strong, Campbell."

They had three heaps: a big Cadillac town car, a station wagon, and a foreign sports roadster. After I had lugged my stuff up into the room on the third floor of the house I got into coveralls and set about washing them down. The first job I tackled was the roadster, backing it out into the light. I noticed that the windshield was smeared and foggy and when the sun struck it I saw why. Somebody had gone over the glass, the steering wheel, and the dashboard with gray aluminum powder, bringing out a number of latent fingerprints.

Carol's voice chirped up simultaneously with the feel of something round and cold in the back of my neck. "Hold it, bud," she said, her voice reedy and breathless. "Keep your hands on the wheel." She had been hiding in the open rumble. "Maybe I oughta blast you."

"Gimme a break, miss," I muttered. "Am I being taken for a ride? Or are you the law?"

She began to giggle. I twisted, reached back and knocked aside her hand, getting ready to grab. Then I saw that the revolver was a glass one. But I followed through. "You want to watch that, miss. If you have to crack down on a guy never keep the heater pressed against him — that's too close. A fast man can take you."

She dropped the glass gun and slid her arms around my neck. "Campbell, Campbell, Campbell! I love you. I think you're a cop. I think you're a private eye."

I felt the blood reaching up my face at this. I got a little gruff. "Now let's get all this mess off your mom's bus. Did you find any good prints?"

We were standing on the gravel and I started to work.

"I found only two identifiable latents. Both Grandpa's."

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"How do you know they're his?"

She moved closer and whispered. "Keep a secret?"

I nodded.

"I have a full set of everybody in the house. I developed them with powder from my Junior G-Man set. And lifted them with Scotch tape. I have a secret fingerprint file."

Her mother came and got her at this point and I went on with my work, thinking hard. The more I thought the worse the whole set-up began to smell.

That night after I had got the green light from the family I drove my own bus down to the village, went into a beer joint, and scooped a handful of change from my pocket. I put through a call, waited for the long distance business to get finished, and then heard Frank Foley's voice.

"Frank? This is Doug Campbell. All smooth, so far. But it's a screwy set-up. I better not send you any written stuff — the phone is best. You want to take notes?"

"The phone is hooked up to a recorder, Doug. Let me turn it on and we'll take it off on an acetate record."

When he said "Okay" I started in, speaking quickly and keeping an eye on the room outside, just in case anybody decided to get curious.

"The household consists of the following," I dictated. "Major John Frobisher, sixty, five nine, one hundred fifty. He's the boss. His daughter, Myrna Starnes, thirty, five five, hundred twenty-five, blonde and bitchy. Her daughter, Carol, eleven, skinny, dark-haired. Nervous twitch of head and compulsive tap of right foot, three times. The kid is too bright and she's nervous as a cat. Nora Flannery, six feet, one-seventy, white-haired, a face that would stop a steam-roller in its tracks. About fifty years old. She's the backstairs boss. Maid and cleaning woman come in by the day. Three cars . . ." I described them and gave the license numbers. I ended up with, "My bedroom is on the third floor, right over the kid's."

I heard Frank, one of my employers, switch off the recording device and then his voice: "Sounds nice, Doug. Don't forget — your job is to watch the kid. Don't spend too much time in the bushes with that blonde. Stick with the kid every minute."

I gave him a soft raspberry and then asked, "Tell me one thing, Frank — who am I working for? Who brought us into the case?"

He sighed. "I told you, Doug, the client's name cannot be revealed. That's final. Even to you."

I hung up. My beer had gone flat and I had the barkeep put a head on it for me.

I didn't quite know what I was supposed to do for my thirty bucks a day. Watch the kid. But why? To keep her from hurting somebody? Or to keep somebody from hurting her?

I had a second beer and pumped the barkeep about the family, but he was a new man and I didn't get a thing.

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When I got back to my room somebody had frisked my bag — I could tell because the order of stuff wasn't the same. Carol.

At breakfast the next morning the Flannery was in a black mood. She slammed a plate of ham and eggs in front of me so hard it bounced, but her disposition hadn't hurt her cooking any. I loaded up. "What's on the program for today?" I asked, just to break the silence. "What is the front of the house liable to be doing?"

She stopped to pour herself a cup of coffee the size of a derby hat. "Ye'll be drivin' them over to the sannytarium. It's the kid's day to have them doctors listen to what she's been dreaming." The noise that followed this was more like a snort than any other human sound, but it was something like a horse's neigh, too.

I drove the Cadillac. Every time I had to stop for a light the kid tapped three times on the window next to her and kicked three times against the drop seat. The major sat in the middle with his arm around her and the mother on the other side. In the mirror I could see Myrna Starnes lighting one cigarette from another; every time the kid went through her tapping routine the mother drew her lips together as if muzzling down a scream. The old gent patted her hand once, but she drew it away and got busy fishing another cigarette out of her case.

The private nut college where we ended up was one of these white-pillared joints where you expected to get a mint julep stuck in your hand the minute you set foot on the porch. I let the folks out and took the car around to the side. Then I got out, lit a butt, and strolled over the grounds. There was an old lady in a lace shawl sitting on a bench under a giant maple. She smiled at me and I touched my cap to her and was about to pass when she pulled out something from a fold of her dress, put it in her mouth, and blew it. It unrolled about a yard, making a raspberry noise, and a feather on the end of it waved under my nose. It was one of those fool things they give out at New Year's Eve parties. I jumped and a girl behind me laughed.

The nurse was a little brunette, very starched, but the curves registered in spite of the uniform. "Don't let Mrs. Gideon scare you," she said. "Mrs. Gideon is celebrating New Year's. Every day is New Year's, isn't it, Mrs. Gideon?"

The old lady nodded, smiling sweetly, and let go with her doodad again, this time at the nurse.

I caught the girl's eye and we fell in step. She wasn't hard to talk to. "You're the new chauffeur for the Frobishers," she said. "Carol is an old pal of mine."

"How's she doing?" I asked.

The brunette in starch gave me a professional smile and said, "Just fine," but it was the old business and I stopped her with a hand on her arm.

"No kidding, sister — open up a little. I have to work for these people and I want to know what I've got

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into. What's the score? I mean, is the kid in a bad way?"

She thought for a minute and then she said, "It would mean the ax for me if they thought I'd discussed a patient with you, but if you want my opinion there's nothing wrong with that kid that getting away from her mama wouldn't cure. Mrs. Starnes is man-crazy. Since her husband was killed she's been dying to get married again but she's had no takers — not with orange blossoms, anyhow. Or have you already been combing her out of your hair?"

I grinned. "Sister, I just started yesterday. By the way, what's your name?"

"I'm Miss Evans."

"Oh. How did her husband get killed?"

She looked at me hard, trying to figure out if I was kidding her. Then she said, "If you're new around here you may not have heard the story. Jack Starnes — Carol's father — was found dead. Something fell on him. The child woke the house up screaming that a bogey man was chasing her and had hurt her daddy. That was when they found Starnes. A suit of armor or something had toppled over on him and a sword that went with it cut his carotid artery. They couldn't save him. But the kid must have seen the accident and she was hysterical. She was better for a while, but lately she's been worse again . . ."

We were interrupted by an old dame who came running up with a market basket on her head for a hat. Miss Evans took her away and I wandered back to the car and had another smoke. I didn't see Evans again, though I kept looking.

When Carol came out she seemed more relaxed, and all the way home she kept singing some screwy number about *There Was an Old Farmer Who Had an Old Sow . . . Eeepf, Eyepf, Eye-dilly-dow . . .*" making pig grunts in the chorus. Only if she muffed one of them she had to go back to the verse and begin all over again. None of the things the kid did were so peculiar in themselves — it was what they all added up to.

That evening they had a nurse come in to sit with the kid and they — that is, Myrna Starnes and her father — loaded up the station wagon with neighbors and we went to a summer theatre that had a Broadway actress as the star.

While they were inside I found a general store that had a soda fountain complete with juke box. I put two quarters in the box, pushed down ten levers, and headed for the telephone booth. I called Frank Foley and asked him to look up the death of Jack Starnes and brief me on it when I called him again.

On the way home I dropped off the major and Myrna at their house, then took the guests around to their respective joints, and brought back the wagon. The house was dark when I pulled in. I found an apple pie in the ice-box and ate half of it, then went up the back stairs softly to my room.

She was sitting by the window in

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the dark. I could see the glow of the cigarette ember and I didn't turn on the light. "Campbell, I wanted to talk to you. I saw you speaking to Miss Evans while Carol was in with Dr. Orr today. I don't want you to listen to gossip about us. That Evans girl is untrustworthy — I know it."

"I wouldn't know, madam. My conversation was what you might call personal, I guess."

"Oh."

If the dame had been on the level she would have bristled at me not turning the light on. I decided that if this was the way she wanted to play it, okay I would string along. She stubbed out her cigarette and stood up. "Campbell, you can be such a tremendous help to us. If I only knew how far I could trust you not to . . . I mean, if I were sure that you would be discreet . . ."

I was now getting the full effect of the perfume she wore. I shifted just a little so she would brush me as she went by. She did and I heard her catch her breath. Then we spun together; I had my fingers in her soft hair and I drew her head back. In the darkness her lips were hot and a little sound squeezed out of her throat. It was as if she were trying to say "No" but not getting very far with it.

She clung to me and I could feel her tremble. Then she went rigid and I could feel the skin tighten between my ears. A scream cut loose from the silence below us and it kept on screaming . . . too high-pitched to sound like anybody's voice.

Myrna cried, "Carol!" and flung herself out into the hall, snapping on the light. We hurried down to the kid's door and Myrna Starnes tried the knob. Then she began beating on the panel. "Carol, it's mother. Everything's all right. Open the door, Carol!"

The voice stopped as suddenly as it had started and we heard a fumbling with the latch. The kid stood there in her pajamas, the pants wrinkled up around her knees. Her cheeks glistened with tears but she seemed to have got hold of herself — a little too tight a hold, I thought.

"I'm sorry I disturbed you, Mother. I had a dream, only this time it lasted too long. It lasted even after I woke up. And I saw a hand with its fingers all curved as if it was clutching at me. And it wouldn't go away when I woke up. So I decided to scream it away. You know what I mean, Mother. I screamed and finally it faded away. And here I am. Good as new." She wiped her nose on her pajama sleeve and then felt in the pocket for her hankie.

"Where was this hand that you saw, Carol?" Myrna sounded curt and businesslike.

"Right there — in the mirror over my dressing table, Mother. I guess it was what Dr. Orr calls a hallucination. But jeepers!"

I was standing at attention in the hall, but I was getting a good gander at the kid's room. It was a young girl's room with a dressing table under a wall mirror and other grown-

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up touches; but the walls still had Noah's Ark animals painted on them.

Myrna turned her head and said, "Thank you, Campbell. You may go, now. Everything is under control."

"Very well, madam. Good evening, Miss Carol. I hope nothing bothers you again."

As I went upstairs I could hear Carol asking her mother why Campbell couldn't sleep in her room on the army cot.

I waited until things quieted down and then I took off my shoes and sneaked downstairs. From the trunk of my old Chevvy I took a leather suitcase and crept back to my room. I locked the door and turned on my light. The perfume still lingered in the air.

I unlocked the case. In one compartment was the spare wire. I took it out and laid it on the bed. There were two miniature microphones — one contact job for pulling sound through walls and the other a little cartridge-shaped one that could be lowered down a ventilator shaft or out of a window. I plugged it into the long wire and lowered it out until it hung just outside the open window of Carol's room. Then I plugged the amplifying unit into the house current, let the tubes warm up, and put on the ear phones. When I could hear Carol's bed creak now and then and pick up the kid's breathing I turned up the volume a little and lay down with the earphones on.

It wasn't the easiest way to sleep but I did get a little shut-eye. I woke up every time Carol muttered in her sleep or turned over, but that was what I wanted. Finally I got up at daylight, pulled in the "bug," and stowed the dictaphone away in the closet. On the closet door I put a private lock which hooked into the facing. I decided that I'd rather answer questions about that lock than have anybody find the bug outfit.

Then I went to sleep for another hour before the alarm clock did its duty. I had been told to watch the kid and I was doing my best. And I didn't need any urging to watch her mama. That was a pleasure, especially from the rear.

Fear hung over that house like a canopy. They were all jittery: Myrna chain-smoking, the major telephoning his brokers a dozen times a day, buying and selling stocks on nothing but hunches, Flannery smashing pans together until it sounded like the kitchen walls were going to shake loose. There was more to it than just a nervous kid, but what it was all about I couldn't figure.

Next day Carol asked her mother if she could take me for a walk. She got an okay on this project and we set out. I knew she had some secret to tell me or show me, so I kept quiet, letting her take the lead. We set off in one direction and then looped back through the woods. Ahead of us, between the trees, I could see an open space where it looked as if the bottom had dropped out of the patch of timber. When we drew nearer I could

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see what it was — a lake in the woods that was more like an old quarry except that it seemed to be natural. The sides dropped straight down for thirty or forty feet. Trees hung over the edges and the water below us was a dark, poisonous green.

I took hold of Carol's hand to keep her from falling in and we paused, looking down on that silent pool for a long minute. Then Carol started to chatter.

"That's the Devil's Looking Glass. That's what the peasants around here call it. Only I love it. It seems so cool and peaceful. I have a make-believe about it. I make believe that I live at the bottom of it — in the make-believe I can breathe water like a fish. I have a house at the bottom all made of glass and the fishes swim in and out of my windows. My voices have told me all about it."

I decided to do a little pumping. I had to go easy because what I don't know about psychiatry is enough to fill all the books I never read; but I took a chance. "Are your voices make-believe, too?"

She jerked her head and shoulder three times and went through the foot-tapping routine. "Oh, no! They're real. I mean they're a real hallucination. I hear them. Lots of people hear voices, don't you think?"

"Yeah," I said. "Plenty."

"Joan of Arc heard voices. Only mine just tell me fairy stories. Like about the Devil's Looking Glass. I tell Dr. Orr every week what the voices tell me and he makes notes."

"What else have the voices told you about this pool?"

She edged closer to it and I tightened my grip on her hand. "Oh, just how nice it is at the bottom. How cool and green and peaceful. Nobody bothers me at the bottom of the pool and I don't have to take any vitamin capsules or anything. And especially liver and bacon. Down there liver and bacon turns into chocolate layer cake. And every piece has a little silver charm hidden in it and when you finish the cake you have enough for a charm bracelet like Mother's."

The kid made me nervous, getting closer and closer to the edge all the time, so I suggested that she show me around the place; but suddenly she quieted down and seemed tired. On our way back we were in sight of the house when she jumped in front of me and pointed her finger at my nose. "Look here, bud," she said in what she thought was a tough voice, "do you know what happens to guys who run off at the mouth?"

"Take it easy, boss," I told her, playing up. "You know you can trust me, boss. Ain't I your bodyguard?" If she wanted to make-believe like a gangster movie I was willing.

She thought this over for a while and then she said, "Okay, Slug. But that other mob will put the heat on you to find out what we've been talking about. Keep your lip buttoned."

The "other mob," I gathered, meant the grown-ups.

That evening the liver and bacon

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question came up at dinner. I could hear Carol screaming that she wouldn't eat it. Her grandfather tried to calm her down. The mother buzzed for Flannery and I gathered they were trying to give the kid a sedative pill. I got out of the kitchen before Flannery came back. I had the evening off and there were things to do.

For one thing, I wanted to date the Evans girl and see what I could get at that end. I got the Chevvy off the private road and gave her the gun. I didn't know what Evans's hours were and I wanted to get to a phone. The summer night was coming on slowly — the sky had that yellowish-green light you often see in summer. I pushed the Chevvy past fifty, with the needle moving along toward sixty, when she began to buck. I didn't hear the tire blow — I was concentrating too hard on holding her on the concrete. Then we bounced off and I felt the soft shoulder of the road clutching for us. I fought the wheel and jerked her back and finally brought her to a stop.

Under the beam of my flash I looked at the tire. It had been slashed with a knife, but whoever did the slashing had scraped and worried it.

The other tires were okay and I got the spare on in record time. But I drove carefully after that. The first telephone was at a roadhouse and I called the sanatarium, but Evans was off duty and off the premises. Then I called Frank Foley, told him the tale so far, then listened while he read me a brief account of Starnes's death.

Five years before, Jack Starnes had been found at the bottom of the stairs in the Frobisher house with a suit of Japanese armor on top of him. It had apparently fallen from its pedestal on the upper landing. A big, two-handed sword which had been wired to the gauntlet of the armor had sliced his neck. He was bleeding badly. Before they could get him to the hospital he died. Carol had got the house up, screaming about the bogeyman. It seemed she had awakened and come out of her room to the top of the stair just in time to see the accident.

The Japanese armor must have been retired to the attic, for it was nowhere around the house now. The kid had insisted at the time that after the bogeyman hurt her daddy he had chased her. Starnes's death was written off as accidental. Nobody gained from it because he didn't believe in life insurance.

That was the story. It all added up neatly enough, but something was still sour in that household. Those people were still afraid of something. Why they didn't go to the cops if they thought that anybody had it in for them was just another mystery.

I had a few beers, gabbed with the barkeep a while, and then headed home. The house was as dark as death and there was no sound except the katydid orchestra in the bushes and the frogs from the lily pond out in front.

I turned on the light in the garage, eased the Chevvy in, then lifted off

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the slashed tire from the rack and began to examine it more carefully. I didn't hear the shot until an empty oil can behind me clonked and tumbled over. I spun, hearing the cough of a small caliber gun, and saw the dented can. In the light of the garage I was like an iron duck in a shooting gallery. It didn't take me long to get the light off. I locked the garage door and waited in the shadows, but nothing happened. That slug had missed me by a good eight feet, yet it had drilled the oil can plumb through the center. It could be bad shooting, at that.

On the way up to my room I stopped by Carol's door and on impulse tried the knob. It was locked. I still wasn't satisfied. I put my ear to the keyhole and I thought I heard the kid's regular breathing; so I took a chance. On my leather key holder I had several skeleton keys and it didn't take me long to get the door open.

My pocket flashlight had insulating tape over the bulb and a hole in the tape gave me the tiniest pinpoint of light. I inched it over the room, exploring the corners first. I could see the kid asleep on the bed and I came closer, giving her the once-over, but keeping the spot of light away from her face. She was sleeping on her back with one arm across her eyes, her fists tightly clenched. And beside her, on the sheet, was a nickel-plated .22 revolver.

I picked it up, slipped it in my pocket, and locked the door again behind me. In the hall I broke the gun and looked at the cartridges. There was one fired. I put the gun back in my pocket and went along upstairs. I could see now why the family all took phenobarbital.

I was tired from my broken sleep of the night before, but I decided to bug into the kid's room again — just in case. It didn't matter if the kid had tried to kill me. I didn't think she had. I remembered back to when I was a kid and shot the silk hat off the mayor of our town with an air rifle. I wasn't trying to put his eye out — I was just after a little excitement. I got plenty. But I hadn't hurt him, nor intended to. Times had changed. Maybe now the kids did their pranks with a .22 and live ammunition. I was glad little Carol didn't have a rocket pistol or a disintegrator ray gun. Or maybe she did.

I lowered the bug out of the window, turned out my light, settled the earphones more comfortably, and corked off to sleep.

Carol must have been moaning and muttering to herself for some time before I woke up, but what woke me was a whisper, sharp and breathy but perfectly clear. "Our house under the pool is all made of glass. The fish that swim in and out are rainbow-colored. Nobody can bother us in the house at the bottom of the pool. No nightmares. No hands trying to get at us. No burglars. No kidnapers. *Nobody* can hurt us there."

I turned up the volume a little.

"When we jump in the water, fairies catch us in their arms and let-

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us down gently — ever so gently. The night never reaches the bottom of the pool. It is always daylight there, nice and cool and green. It's never dark and scarey, and there are no scarey faces."

The whispering stopped and I heard the bed creak as the kid turned over suddenly. She moaned and then I caught the words, "Liver and bacon." That still seemed to be a sore point.

I was just getting back to sleep when the whispering started again. It was about the pool — more of the same.

I got up, slipped on my robe, pulled on my shoes, and dropped the .22 into the robe's pocket. I took my key case and my pocket flash. Through the earphones I could hear Carol moving about the room as if she were getting dressed.

When I got down to the kid's room her door was ajar and the room was empty. I stood listening in the silence of the dark house and then I heard the back door close softly. This was my cue to get downstairs as fast as I could without making noise.

Outside on the driveway I stood for a moment, trying to find her, but the moon had slipped behind a cloud. When it came out again I saw her. She was running toward the patch of woods that held the Devil's Looking Glass.

I started to sprint. I saw an opening in the trees that looked like a short-cut and I plunged in. The next minute I was being catapulted back by what seemed an invisible hand pushing me in the chest. Then I saw what had happened — I was hung up on the loose strands of a barbed wire fence.

It seemed like an hour before I tore the barbs out of my clothes and managed to wriggle between the strands. My breath was burning my chest when I came within hailing distance of that opening in the trees where it seemed that the bottom had fallen out of the earth.

In a patch of moonlight near the edge I saw Carol. She was standing on the brink, looking down into the inky dark of the pool. Softly I called her name. "Carol, Carol, wait for your old pal. This is Slug Campbell . . ."

With a little cry she spun around and her foot slipped. She clutched wildly at a branch out of her reach and then she vanished. The last thing I saw was the child's horrified face turned up into the moonlight.

Tearing off the robe I reached the bank in time to hear a splash far below. I hurried along the edge a few yards, looked down, took a deep breath, and over I went. I had no idea how deep the water was at that spot or whether there were rocks just under the surface. All I could do was to dive as if I were going into a six-foot tank of water at the fair grounds, and trust to luck.

I seemed to drop forever. Then I acted automatically. I felt the roar of the water rushing past me and I was up again, the speed I had gained on the way down shooting me half-

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way out of the water. I began to tread water carefully but I was all in one piece. There was no sign of Carol — the surface was quieting down again. I set off, swimming toward the spot where she had gone in.

Then there was a splash and I saw the kid's face come up, her hair plastered over her cheeks. Ten good strokes brought me to her and I got behind her, grabbing her by the hair. I began to talk.

"Okay, boss. This is Campbell. You got nothing to worry about. Take it easy and breathe deep."

I could tell she was conscious by the way she tried to kick her feet. Apparently the kid could swim a little. She still couldn't talk.

At one spot, down at the other end of the pool, I could make out a more gradual slope, studded with trees. If there was any way out that was it, so I headed for it, swimming on my side.

I grabbed a tree root at last and hauled us both up out of the water. When she got into the air Carol began to shiver. Between her chattering teeth she said, "It wasn't so. It isn't light down there. It's dark. It's dark. It's awful."

"It's just a swimming hole, boss, with kind of steep sides."

We rested. Then we started up the bank, climbing through the trees and brush. When we got to the top I picked Carol up and carried her to where I had dropped my robe. I wrapped her in it and set off for the house.

Halfway there she said, "I can walk now." I put her down, and she walked beside me, holding my robe bunched up around her.

Once she stopped, feeling something heavy in the pocket, and she pulled out that .22 revolver and stood looking at it by the light of the moon. "Gee, Slug, you've got a real rod."

"Didn't you ever see that one before, boss?" I was ready to grab for it but she handed it to me, butt first.

"No, you never showed it to me."

"Do you have one like it? Or does anybody in the house have one?"

She shook her head. "No. 'Cause if they did I would have borrowed it. I would have shot rats with it. There are rats over behind the garage. I would have cooled off a couple of them if I'd had that heater."

Somehow I believed her. But that wasn't to say that she might not have walked in her sleep sometime, found the gun, and hidden it. And then found it again when she was asleep. She said nothing more about falling into the pool and I figured the best thing to do was for me not to mention it. Not right then, anyhow.

In the shadow of the back door she whispered to me, "You won't tell Mama or Grandpa that I fell in. Promise?"

"Promise. Only if you feel like walking out there again, tell me first. That's a promise, too."

She nodded.

Upstairs I told her to get a bath towel and give herself a good rubdown before she put her pajamas on.

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I sneaked upstairs, got out of my wet clothes, dressed as fast as a fireman, and came back to Carol's room.

She had changed and was drying her hair. "You sit here with me until I get to sleep, Campbell."

"Can you sleep?" I asked her. "Do you need a pill?"

She shook her head. The shock was beginning to register. Then she lay back, pulled the blankets over her, and dropped off like a shot.

I got up to turn off her bed light and then I saw myself in the mirror of her dressing table. I looked ghastly — the mirror had a faint blue tint. At first I thought that that was what had given the kid those ideas about living under the water of the pool. And then I thought of something else. My angle on the set-up changed.

I snapped off the light and settled myself in a chair at the foot of her bed. The chair creaked and Carol woke up. "Who is it?"

"Campbell, boss," I whispered. "Relax."

She sat hugging her knees, and then her head drooped. Sleepily she said, "In there is where they keep it."

"In where?"

She pointed toward the wall. "In the closet right there. The suit of armor that fell on Daddy. And the sword. Grandpa locked it up in there after it fell. They won't let me see it. The closet door is right outside in the hall but Grandpa always keeps it locked. I wanted to see if the face on the helmet was the same . . ."

"Go on, boss. Same as what?"

She had fallen back and was settling her head in the pillow. "The same as the one I see in my dreams . . ." Then she was really asleep, breathing regularly.

I don't know how long it was until I feel asleep myself. But when I awoke it was still dark. And from deep inside my own mind something seemed to be whispering to me. "Wake up. Wake up. You're in danger. Look — he's come again. This time he will get you. He will get you . . ."

I opened my eyes. The whisper wasn't inside my head — it was inside the room. It came out of the darkness, sharp and urgent.

Carol never stirred. I could hear her breathing. So the whispering wasn't her voice.

"Look, Carol. In the looking glass. Look. He's come again."

The kid moaned this time, but still didn't wake up.

Then something flickered across the room — a spot of light in the dressing-table mirror. It shifted and grew brighter. I turned to see if anything was being reflected from the opposite wall, but that was dark; the image was in the mirror itself.

I watched and suddenly a face glowed in the glass. And it was a nightmare — grinning mouth, bulging eyeballs. It was the face of a Japanese war helmet. Then the radiance died and I sat back in my chair.

Suddenly the whispering began again and I seemed able to spot it as

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coming from the baseboard under the dressing table. "Wake up, Carol. Wake up. Danger. A kidnaper . . ."

Light glinted again in the mirror. And this time it was a man's head, hat pulled down over the eyes, face hidden by a bandana mask. A hand slid out of sight and when it appeared once more, it carried a .45 automatic. And the gun was leveled slowly, pointing at the child in the bed.

The .22 in my hand popped once and the light behind the mirror went out in a tinkle of falling glass.

Carol screamed and was answered by a hoarse cry on the other side of the wall. I heard a door open and the sound of bare feet running. Myrna Starnes's voice came from the corridor along with a rattling of the doorknob. "Carol! Carol, what's happened?"

I let her in, and ducked past her into the hall. The door to the closet wasn't locked and I threw it open.

A man in blue-striped pajamas and a dark blue robe was stretched on the floor, groaning and holding his shoulder. I picked up the Army .45 and then pulled the mask from his face. Major Frobisher looked up at me, his lips working. "Get a doctor. Get help."

I heard a snort behind us and Flannery's voice growled, "I don't know what ye've been up to, but it's some devilment, I'll be bound."

"Help me get him into his own room," I told her.

He couldn't walk, but it was only fright. He thought he was dying. But the .22 had only winged him in the shoulder.

We laid him on the bed in his own room and I stopped the bleeding by holding my thumb on the pressure point of his collar bone. Behind us Myrna came in and when I looked up I saw that Carol was with her, holding on tight.

"What's happened to Grandpa? Why is the mirror broken in my room?"

"The major's been shot," I told them. "That mirror is a two-way number — you can see through it from the other side. And by holding a flashlight on your face from the back, anybody standing in front of it will see you looking like a ghost in the glass. The major tried it first with the Jap helmet and then with a hat and mask. But he shouldn't have pulled that .45 on me. I blasted him with the .22 — the same one he used to fire at me earlier. He left it on the bed beside Carol where I found it. The whole thing was a set-up to make Carol — and the rest of you — think the kid was batty." I turned to the man on the bed. "You'd better talk fast, Major. You may not have much time."

"Don't let me die!"

"Okay, start talking."

He swallowed and shut his eyes. "I didn't mean to hurt Carol. But I had to fix it . . . fix it so nobody would believe her. She was beginning to remember . . ."

I heard the child gasp. Then her voice spoke out harshly. "You killed my Daddy. I do remember it! I saw you. I had got up to see who was

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quarreling downstairs. I saw Daddy hit you and I saw you run upstairs and when you got to the landing he was right after you and you pushed that . . . that armor thing at him. And the sword cut Daddy. Then the face came after me and I got scared and forgot what I had seen . . . ."

The major interrupted her. "It's true. I killed Jack. But I didn't murder him. I wanted to keep him from beating me. He had found out that I was using some of Myrna's money to play the market. I was afraid of him. But I was afraid they'd charge me with murder. I tried to scare Carol into forgetting. And then when she began remembering a few weeks ago I got panicky again . . ."

"Take it easy, Major," I told him. "You aren't going to die just yet. But I've got to call the cops." I pulled out my wallet and showed them my credentials. "I'm a private detective."

I motioned to Myrna to come over and keep the pressure on the artery, but she was glaring at him, her breath whistling between her bared teeth. She wasn't so good-looking then.

I spoke to Flannery, who was standing by like a mountain in a faded dressing gown. "Hand me that telephone." It was out of reach on a small table.

Silence. I looked at her. She was holding the little .22, which she must have snaked out of my pocket while I was busy with the major. And it was pointing at my middle.

"Ye'll not call the law yet, Campbell. Until ye've heard me out. Ye'll not bring John Starnes back by making the child's grandfather out to be a murderer. I'm not thinking of him and his snivelin', treacherous ways. I'm thinking of Carol, the darlin'. I knew the child was sane — saner than him there, by a long ways. I knew something was being done to her — she was being deviled into thinking she was mad. I asked me nephew, Jim Reilly, who's on the force in the city, to tell me what to do and he sent me to the private detectives. It was me brought you out here, Campbell, to watch over Carol. But now that ye've shot him ye'll have to think up something to tell the law."

"Go ahead and call the police," Myrna Starnes said from between her teeth. "See if I care."

The major moaned. "Don't let me die, Campbell. Get a doctor. I'll tell anything . . . only help me!"

I was cooking up a dozen ghost-stories a minute and rejecting them all. A doctor would get curious about a bullet wound and I didn't want to stick my neck out any farther than I had to. On the other hand, it wouldn't look so good for the agency to have its ops blasting people in their own houses.

Carol was the one who broke up the log jam. "I think Grandpa is definitely bats," she said, speaking quickly but without the head-jerk or the foot-tapping. "I think he ought to go over to Dr. Orr's hospital and get himself a nice padded cell or

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something. Maybe wet packs . . ."

I grinned at her. "You've got it, kid. That's the answer." I turned to the major. "You heard her. Will you play it our way — commit yourself as a mental case and keep it quiet? Or do you want me to tell the cops?"

He was white around the mouth. "Get Dr. Orr. I'll . . . I'll do anything you say. Only get him quickly."

I looked at Myrna, but she was already at the phone. ". . . tell Dr. Orr to come himself. It's very important. His . . . his patient has tried to commit suicide."

I bandaged the old boy's shoulder and he kept whispering, "You won't doublecross me, Campbell? You'll really let me go to Dr. Orr's? I'll stay there, I swear it! Myrna can have the house. She can have every penny I've got left. Believe me, I didn't mean any permanent harm to that child."

"Shut up," I told him. "You slashed my tire to throw suspicion on the kid. Your whispering through a slit in the baseboard nearly got the kid drowned in that tadpole preserve you've got in the woods. But that trick mirror you rigged up when you had her room done over — that mirror opening into the closet was the real Devil's Looking Glass. If it wasn't for the kid I'd throw you to the lions."

Dr. Orr showed up with a couple of huskies in white and the major went with them quietly enough. He must have really been a little cracked.

When the house had quieted down, Myrna Starnes still sat in the kitchen. She was lacing her tea with rum.

"I'll be pulling out in the morning," I told her. "Flannery gave the agency two hundred bucks as a retainer. Don't forget her on payday."

She set down her teacup and stood up, facing me. "I am quite capable of managing my own affairs, Campbell."

"Doug's the name, pal." I reached out and slid my hand around her but she twisted away and stood with her arms folded, looking at me as if I were a roach running up the wall.

"I'm afraid you have misunderstood me, Campbell." She smiled thinly. "Or should I say *Mister* Campbell. After all, a *detective* . . ."

I came closer, grinning. "Detective — chauffeur — ditch-digger — congressman — they're all alike to me, pal . . ." I took her wrists and forced them behind her. I held her thumbs crossed with one hand and with the other hand I bent her head back, and then I kissed her, hard and long and punishing. Her eyes stayed open, full of murder. ". . . and a babe is a babe."

I turned then and went up to my own room and began getting my stuff together. I left with the first streak of daylight, the house dark and silent behind me. I always intended to go back there sometime and visit the kid, Carol. But somehow I never got the chance.

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INTRODUCTION BY JAMES YAFFE

Books about children seem to fall into two categories. There are those which treat childhood as a charming and nostalgic idyll, a sort of dream world populated by strange picturesque little creatures who differ essentially from the adults around them. At the opposite extreme, there are the books which treat childhood as a grim psychological preparation for manhood, a nightmare world populated by embryo men already beginning to store up the neurotic experiences which will haunt their subconscious minds in later years. In the first category are the masterpieces of Mark Twain and Booth Tarkington. In the second category is practically every serious novel about childhood published in the last twenty years. There is truth, of course, in both points of view — but how rare is the book that combines the two!

Daniel Nathan's THE GOLDEN SUMMER *is one of the very few contemporary works which achieves this feat. The episode of "The Boy and the Money Box" illustrates the point perfectly. The whimsical glory of Danny's "golden summer" is present in every line, in every touch — for example, in Danny's peculiarly childlike reaction to* THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS, *in the details of his "secret society" and particularly the deep secret of how it got its mysterious name, in his imaginative excursion into the world of Dan'l Boone, in his fascination with the adventures of detective Craig Kennedy. But at the same time the author makes Danny much more than the stock all-American boy of the Penrod-imitators. Without glossing over a thing, he shows us the weaknesses in Danny's character — his cowardliness, his insecurity, his over-cleverness, his early obsession with money as a means of compensating for his thick glasses and his short stature. Danny is at one and the same time a Boy, touched by the special magic of Boyhood, and an individual, clearly and unsentimentally observed on his way to becoming a particular type of man.*

When THE GOLDEN SUMMER *appeared several years ago, most of its critics missed this point, which happens to be* the *point of the book. One review, I recall, actually took Mr. Nathan to task for "attempting to create another Penrod, but failing to make him lovable enough." Because of this kind of misunderstanding,* THE GOLDEN SUMMER *never received the attention it deserves. I hope that EQMM's decision to reprint several of its episodes will stimulate many of its readers to investigate the rest of this enjoyable, funny, sad book about childhood.*

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THE ADVENTURES OF DANNY:

1. The Boy and the Money Box

by DANIEL NATHAN

DANNY REACHED THE BOTTOM OF page 14 of *The Last of the Mohicans* and the bottom of his glass of breakfast milk simultaneously. He sighed. It was the fifth time he had started the book and the fifth time he had bogged down on page 14. Of course he had always skipped the Introduction, and five times he had managed to struggle through Chapter I, but when he again got to the place in Chapter II where the young British officer said, "Manifest no distrust, or you may invite the danger you appear to apprehend," he just couldn't go any further. Did they really talk that way in the olden days?

It was the promise of danger that kept Danny going back to *The Last of the Mohicans*, but he could never read far enough for the danger to materialize in words. The frontispiece also kept drawing him back — there was the young British officer being saved by Uncas, with Hawkeye, knife in hand, rushing up from the rear, and the vanquished Indian falling headfirst "down the irrecoverable precipice." Danny always wondered what kind of precipice was an "irrecoverable" one.

But it was hopeless. He usually finished a book about Frank Merriwell or the Boy Allies in a single sitting. Now he closed *The Last of the Mohicans*, took off his nickel-plated eyeglasses and wiped them surreptitiously on the tablecloth, replaced them somewhat crookedly on the bridge of his large nose, ambled dreamily out of the kitchen past the huge ornamented black iron stove and up the stairs to his bedroom, and then, with the spirit of James Fenimore Cooper still upon him, changed to his Dan'l Boone outfit. Thus dressed in full regalia, with buckskin tunic, fringed all around, and a coonskin cap, he picked up his long wooden flintlock rifle, crept silently out of the house, and began stalking through the back yards.

The next fifteen minutes of that golden summer (so many years ago!) were busy ones for Danny. He evaded a whole tribe of hostile Indians who were obviously on the warpath, killed a mountain lion after a desperate struggle, and even discovered a gold mine (near Dewitt Avenue) which he carefully staked out preparatory to filing a claim and having samples of the ore (chips off a boulder) assayed at the nearest government office. When he finally came to Barnaby's Barn, he saw to his delight that the old farm wagon was back, piled high with bales of hay.

By the time Sartorious showed up, Danny had a new game all planned.

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The hay-piled farm wagon had become an old covered wagon of the pioneer days, and sitting on the high seat at the front of the wagon, Danny had become an intrepid explorer of the Western plains. He held an imginary pair of reins nonchalantly in his gloved left hand — "Why, driving hosses is just as easy as rolling off'n a log! Git along now — pronto!"

Ambidextrously Danny flicked an imaginary whip on the backs of his tuckered-out horses as he instructed Sartorious to mount the bales of hay, shade his eyes with his palms, and keep a sharp lookout into the far distance — out where the imaginary mesquite and the powder-dry earth dozed invisibly in the Western sun. There was always the danger, Danny warned, of a surprise attack by Indians. Then arrows and war whoops would fill the air, cayuses would come galloping out of clouds of dust, and tomahawks would be poised to slice their scalps clean off the tops of their heads.

The game was less than five minutes old and the covered wagon was just rumbling up to an imaginary water hole when Owgoost, the big burly son of the neighboorhood blacksmith and easily the strongest boy around, came striding down the lane. He stood in front of the wagon and stared up at Danny in the driver's seat. Danny frantically waved his match-stick arms.

"Out of the way, Owgoost, or you'll be stampeded for sure!"

"What are you talking about, Danny? Nothing's going to stampede me. That wagon's standing stock-still and it can't move nohow."

"This-yeer is a *covered* wagon, Owgoost! I'm Dan'l Boone and the hosses are plumb crazy with thirst — we been traveling over the Western plains since nigh onto sunup and they ain't had no water. Look out! They'll trample you under their hoofs!"

Owgoost gaped for a long moment — as if he couldn't trust the evidence of his own eyes. Then he laughed mockingly.

"You and all your sappy ideas, Danny old boy! Always making something up! Covered wagon — why, there ain't no cover on top of that wagon!"

Danny looked hurt. "'Tis so a covered wagon — ain't it, Sartorious?"

Sartorious suddenly yelled: "They're a-comin', Danny! Scads and scads of 'em! What'll we do, Mister Boone?"

Owgoost looked around. His face wore a puzzled expression.

"Who's comin'? I don't see nobody."

Danny scoffed. "Ain't you got eyes, Owgoost? The Injuns are a-comin' — it's an Injun attack, that's what it is! They'll burn the wagon and massacre us for sure. Out with your guns, men, but don't shoot till you see the whites of their eyes! Hold back your fire till I give the signal!"

Danny lashed his imaginary horses with his imaginary whip. "C'mon, you critters — bust 'er wide open!"

Sartorious started slapping his

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mouth, letting loose a burst of war whoops.

"Ah-wah-wah-ah-wah-wah!"

Danny groaned. "Not like that, Sart! You're a settler, not an Injun! You're just supposed to be chewing tobacker like mad and being strong and silent and waiting stokely for the attack . . . C'mon, you varmints — let 'er rip!"

By this time Owgoost was convinced. It *was* a covered wagon and Indians *were* riding down on them hell-bent for leather.

Danny yelled: "They've began to circle round us! They've attackted us! Hold your fire, men, till they get closer — and then make every shot count! Yip*pee!*"

The play-acting was so real by now that Owgoost had started to climb onto the wagon.

Danny extended his tiny hand to help Owgoost get aboard.

"C'mon, Owgoost, hurry up! Load your gun and be ready to make 'em bite the dust!"

When Owgoost reached the seat he pushed Danny aside.

"I'm driving, Danny — shove over onto the hay."

"You can't drive, Owgoost — I'm Dan'l Boone! You ain't got no outfit on!"

"Who says I'm not driving?"

"But I'm Dan'l Boone — I got to be the leader!"

Owgoost shook his enormous fist. "I don't care if you're Dan'l Boone or Dan'l Nathan or even Dan'l Webster. I say I'm driving."

Danny became so angry that he forgot his habitual caution. He jumped at Owgoost, and the surprise attack — while the Indians presumably froze into a tableau around them — sent the two boys sprawling to the ground. Owgoost picked himself up, paying no attention to Danny, and began climbing back to the driver's seat. Danny, too incensed now to remember the virtues of discretion, pulled Owgoost back.

"It's my game," squeaked Danny, "and you ain't gonna take away my driver's seat!"

Sartorious, still on top of the bales of hay, stared at Danny in astonishment and dismay. What the blazes had got into him, acting up to Owgoost that way? Owgoost himself turned slowly and the grim look on his face brought Danny to his senses.

"You loony or something?" snarled Owgoost. "I said *I'm* the driver of this here covered wagon and you want to do something about it? Yeah, y'wanna start something?"

Danny had miraculously cooled down. But although his mind was clear now, he realized that he had gone too far to back down completely. He just couldn't crawl with Sartorious there to witness his defeat. Besides, he was wearing his Dan'l Boone suit and it would disgrace the memory of Dan'l Boone if he gave up without even protesting.

For a few long moments Danny could not think of what to say. He stood there, trembling and tongue-tied.

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Owgoost interpreted Danny's silence as indicative of normal capitulation. "Well," crowed Owgoost, "I guess *that's* settled. I'm the driver, ain't I?"

Danny extended a feeler. Even a compromise would be easier to swallow than total surrender. "How about leaving me be the driver just till this Injun attack is over? Then you can be the driver for the rest of the game — and to-morrow too."

Owgoost spread his powerful legs. "This is the last time I say it. *I'm* the driver, see?"

A red mist suddenly enveloped Danny. Throwing all further caution to the winds, he stooped and picked up a small twig. Dramatically he placed it on his left shoulder and stood as erect as his bandy legs would permit him. The top of his hairy head did not even come up to Owgoost's chin. But he knew the right strategy now — he knew how to outwit Owgoost.

"I dare you!" squeaked Danny. "I dare you, Owgoost, to knock this here chip off my shoulder. I just dare you!"

Owgoost stared at Danny. He was so surprised that for a moment he was speechless. Then he growled:

"Yeah, you think you're so smart, wearing glasses and all. You know dang well, Danny Nathan, there's a law against hitting anybody with specs on. You want me to break the law? 'Sides, only 'fraidy-cats and yeller-bellies hide behind sissy glasses. Yeah, sissy glasses! You know what, Sartorious, Danny's going to change his name. Our old pal ain't named Danny no more. Hello, Percy — or perhaps it's Algernon!"

Danny's bravado had reached its peak during Owgoost's speech. Moreover, the final taunt had been too much. Recklessly, Danny acted to meet the challenge. With tight-lipped intensity — almost with insolence — he slipped off his eyeglasses and placed them carefully on an old horse blanket lying on the ground. In the process the twig fell off, but he snatched up an even larger one and balanced it on his shoulder. Then he turned to Owgoost, squinted his eyes until they began to water, bared his crooked teeth, and almost screeched:

"There! I dare you now! I *double* dare you!"

Danny felt supremely safe.

This time Owgoost was even more surprised. Again he was caught off guard, while his slower mind grappled with Danny's unexpected maneuver.

Danny began to grin. He was sure his trick had worked. No doubt about it, he was safe as houses. Only chicken thieves and such like would take *that* kind of dare! Indeed, Danny was so certain in his own mind that he was playing an unbeatable game, he decided impulsively to go the whole hog, to push his psychological advantage to the limit.

"Yeah, ye dasn't knock this-yeer chip off my shoulder. Only egg suckers take dares — so I dare you, Owgoost! I dare you, I double dare you, I *triple* dare you!"

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By now Owgoost had fully recovered. He shook his bushy head sadly. "You shouldn't oughta of said that, Danny-boy, you shouldn't oughta of." Then, calmly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to do, he raised his gorilla-like paw and flicked the twig off Danny's shoulder. The twig dropped gently to the ground.

Danny's eyes popped and his mouth flew open. He couldn't believe it! He just couldn't believe it! He had always taken for granted that no one would accept a double dare, much less a triple dare. Why, a triple dare was one of the most potent magical charms ever devised by the mind of boy. And yet Owgoost had taken it without the slightest qualm!

But the worst was yet to come.

Suddenly Owgoost lost his temper. He had stood enough of this dang-fool nonsense. He raised his fist, took a tremendous roundhouse swing, and smacked Danny right in the eye.

Danny dropped as if he had been plunked through the heart with an Indian arrow.

He lay writhing in the dirt and hay, Owgoost towering over him, taunting him to get up and fight. "You're just a goldarn quitter — that's what you are!" Oh, the humiliation, the anguish! Danny just couldn't get it through his head: Owgoost had broken one of the basic rules of human behavior — he had gone and taken a triple dare!

As he lifted himself off the ground Danny realized that the very foundations of his faith had been knocked out from under him. Never again could he believe implicitly in certain unwritten, certain accepted laws.

Struggling to his feet, Danny again saw red. He came up with his puny arms churning. Rashly he hurled himself at his tormenter and beat his fists against Owgoost's sturdy chest. He flailed and he pounded and he windmilled — and all Owgoost did was laugh! In fact, the blacksmith's son laughed so hard that tears began to stream down his big moon-face.

It was the ultimate humiliation.

Gasping, Danny sank to his knees, groped blindly for his eyeglasses, and finally located them on the old horse blanket. He stuck them lopsidedly in front of his aching eye, and with his Dan'l Boone suit dusty and torn, as if it had just come through an Indian war, he slunk home.

In the bathroom upstairs he examined his injured eye.

It was going to turn black any minute.

Danny threw himself on his bed, behind a locked door, and wept bitterly. It seemed all too clear to him that life was no longer worth living — not in a world of broken codes and smashed illusions — and Owgoost.

After a few minutes a new consideration crept into Danny's mind — a growing suspicion that he had made a serious error in tactics. He mulled over it . . . Of course! Why hadn't he thought of it at the time? Why do the best ideas always come afterward, when it is too late?

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Danny shook his head and the tears changed their course down his cheeks. He was mortified. As he lay on his bed, a shivering puppy of a boy, he couldn't help reproaching himself: he could have done better, so much better. If only he had thought of it before, he could have beaten Owgoost all hollow.

He just hadn't gone far enough with his challenge. He had triple dared Owgoost — but suppose he had *forple* dared him!

Danny's world was destined to become even darker . . .

That afternoon he was sitting in the TGH clubhouse with Chad and Sartorious — the only other members of his "secret society" — and they were discussing Danny's fight with Owgoost. The clubhouse was a partially renovated chicken coop, standing somewhat askew in the Nathan back yard. Strangely enough, Danny had suffered no loss of prestige from his defeat by Owgoost — indeed, Sartorious's report of the encounter had actually heightened Danny's reputation.

"Yes sir," Sartorious had told all the boys, "you should of saw little peanut Danny. He got knocked down by a terrific uppercut from Owgoost and he got up from the ground and layed right into Owgoost and lambasted him proper. Course little peewee couldn't hurt Owgoost none, but he wasn't afraid of him, I'll say that. Yes sir, Danny showed that big bully all right!"

Deep down Danny knew this was not exactly an accurate account, but it did help console him for the physical damage he had sustained — by this time his bruised eye was a small island in a purplish lake.

Chad was now the bearer of ill tidings. It seemed that Mitch, the new boy who lived on the other side of High Street, had been a witness to the celebrated one-round bout between Danny and Owgoost — Mitch had been watching from the corner of Mr. Herman's shoe-repairing shop at the foot of the lane. And when Owgoost had finally left the barn, Mitch had taken him aside and — so went the rumor — made Owgoost a proposition.

The story now circulating the neighborhood was that Owgoost and Mitch had become partners. The two worst ruffians in town were now in cahoots! It meant that none of the other boys would be safe from attack and that working together, Owgoost and Mitch could terrorize the environs of High and John Streets where Danny and his TGH secret society usually operated in comparative freedom.

Danny summed up the decision reached by his fellow members: "Okay then, we just got to stick together — that's what we got to do. Dang that Mitch — he's always making trouble for us!"

At that moment the two young hoodlums themselves marched into the Nathan back yard. Danny, Chad, and Sartorious exchanged frightened

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glances. Were they to be the first victims of the unholy alliance between Owgoost and Mitch?

Mitch did the talking. "Owgoost and me have decided we're going to join your club. Ain't that so, Owgoost?"

Owgoost nodded his head.

"Yes sir, Owgoost and me we've decided you three can't have no secret society without us. You three been getting away with things too long around here — being 'sclusive and all."

Danny, emboldened by his recent moral victory over Owgoost, spoke up: "You two can't bust in here and join our club just because you want to! No sir! We won't leave you into our secrets!"

Mitch leered. "Oh no Dan-o? Maybe you'd like another thrashing like the one I seen you get this morning — and I'll give it to you this time. Okay, Owgoost?"

Owgoost nodded again. He was still the king-pin and obviously was enjoying his extended power.

Danny got hot under the collar. "You and who else? This is a free country, ain't it? We don't have to take you into our club if we don't want to. Okay, just start something. We're three against your two — so just go ahead and start something!"

Danny had been carried away by the events of the morning. What a day it had been so far! Chad and Sartorious nudged him with their elbows to bring him to his senses. Danny must have gone nutty to think the three of them could handle Owgoost and Mitch. The three of them could deal with Mitch all right, but Owgoost could whip the entire membership of the TGH all by himself. Danny knew that — what *had* got into him to-day?

The nudging from his two best friends woke Danny up. Suddenly he realized that for the second time today he had gone too far. His big nose turned white at the nostrils and he began to perspire. He looked anxiously at Owgoost and Mitch.

Curiously enough, Mitch seemed no longer belligerent. He had been impressed by Danny's unexpected aggressiveness. But he glanced at Owgoost, who grinned and nodded once more. Mitch's confidence surged back.

"You leave us into your secret society or I'll — or Owgoost and me will tear your old clubhouse apart right now!"

For the first time Owgoost spoke. In the last week his father had had to pay for three broken windows on John Street, all blamed on Owgoost. He couldn't get involved in any more claims for damages — not for a while, at least — or his father would tan him good.

"Now no rough stuff, Mitch old boy — not just yet anyways. They'll leave us in, won't you, fellas?"

Danny looked at Chad and Sartorious. He could see the verdict in their eyes. However doleful the prospect — having Owgoost and Mitch as members of the TGH — they preferred that to the only alternative, a

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going over by Owgoost and his criminous lieutenant.

Danny bowed to the inevitable. "Okay, fellas, we'll consider your appulcations — just give us a little time to consider them."

Owgoost grinned again. "Okay, we'll give you till after supper-time to-night. You don't leave us in by then and tell us all the rules and regulations, and specially what the letters TGH mean, I'll just leave Mitch here go to work on this old chicken coop of yourn."

Owgoost and Mitch were walking off when Danny got an idea. Maybe even this black cloud had a silver lining.

"Just a second, Owgoost! Okay, suppose we leave you and Mitch in — just suppose, mind you! Would you have any objections if we leave some of the other fellas in too?"

Owgoost looked puzzled. He studied Danny's question, fishing for some trick or hidden meaning. Then, finding none, he said: "Okay, I ain't got no objections — don't hurt me none. What do you think, Mitch? Should we ought to leave the other guys in?"

Mitch said, "Okay if you say so, Owgoost."

Danny purred. His plan was working. "Okay, we'll consider leaving in a limited number — you, Owgoost, and Mitch here, and say four more. O-*kay!*"

It was the week of that golden summer when O.K. had become the favorite word in every American boy's vocabulary. The term had suddenly burst into widespread popularity when it was learned that President Woodrow Wilson had been using it in approving official documents.

Danny's confidence had soared. He now felt in complete control of the situation. "Oh yeah, just one more thing, Owgoost old pal. If we leave you and Mitch and the others in, there's got to be a 'nishiation fee, you know. Okay?"

Owgoost glowered.

Danny's confidence dropped a few pegs.

"'Nishiation fee!" bellowed Owgoost. "The heck you say!"

Although the palms of his hands had begun to sweat, Danny persisted. "Every club charges a 'nishiation fee to new members, Owgoost. You ask anybody — they'll tell you. Even ask your father. If he belongs to the Elks like my father, he'll tell you it's okay — perfectly okay."

Owgost turned to his Grand Vizier. "He right about that 'nishiation fee stuff, Mitch?"

An odd expression had come over Mitch's ugly face. He stood on his tiptoes and whispered in Owgoost's ear. Owgoost listened and the scowl on his face turned to surprise. Then he grinned.

"Okay, Danny old boy, Mitch and me will pay the 'nishiation fees if all the other new fellas in the club do too. Fair for one, fair for all, like I always say. How much?"

Danny pondered. He didn't want to make it too high and precipitate

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a dangerous digression — yet he didn't want to make it too low and thus fail to make the most of the opportunity. He finally hit on what he judged to be a safe figure.

"How about — say — uh — ten cents each? You got to admit our secret club's been in existence a long time. Okay?"

Owgoost consulted his adviser again. Mitch nodded sagely.

"Okay, Danny old boy, ten cents it is. We'll bring the dough round tonight — right here to the clubhouse. And be sure to tell the other fellas to bring their 'nishiation fees too."

When Owgoost and Mitch had left, Chad turned on Danny.

"What's the big fat idea, Danny?"

"Yeah," said Sartorious, "what's crawling in that noodle of yourn?"

Danny explained patiently. "You both dopes or something? Look. We *gotta* leave 'em in — will you admit that?"

Chad scratched his red hair. "Well, yes-s-s, I guess they'll *make* us leave them in."

Sartorious nodded gloomily. "Yeah, we gotta or they'll gang up on us for sure."

Danny spread his hands. "Okay, there you are. If we *gotta* leave 'em in, why not make a little profit on the deal?"

The brother club members saw the light.

"Sure! And if we leave others in too, we'll make even more!"

"You bet your boots!" exclaimed Sartorious. "We leave Owgoost and Mitch and four others in, that's six, and if we charge 'em ten cents apiece, that's sixty cents!"

"Now you got it," said Danny in a lofty tone. "And that there sixty cents is ours — it's our club and we're the charted members and we split the 'nishiation fees. That comes to twenty cents apiece for the three of us!"

Sartorious beamed. "Okay, we leave 'em in! I'm sure enough willing."

Chad beamed. "Got to hand it to you, Danny old kiddo! That's getting us out of a mess okay, okay!"

But Chad proved to be a poor prophet.

That night the TGH secret society admitted six new members — Owgoost and Mitch, of course, and four others carefully selected by Danny, Chad, and Sartorious. The four others were Sid, Pete, Toby, and Pidge.

The initiation fees were paid over to Danny, in his twofold capacity as President and Treasurer of the TGH — Chad and Sartorious were Vice-Presidents. Danny put the coins into a shoe box with a slit in the top — the one labeled *TResHury*. Then the charter members of the club expounded on the rules and regulations of the organization, acquainting the new members with the secret password, countersign, and the special handshake.

Owgoost then demanded: "Yeah, that's all good stuff, but what does the letters TGH mean? That's what I want to know."

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Danny explained the code name of the secret society — it was he who had originally worked it out.

"It comes from that slick serial at The Happy Hour — you know, *The Exploits of Elaine* — with Perfessor Craig Kennedy and his assistant Jameson. It comes from the name of the master crook — the one the detectives are trying to lay hold of."

"But that's The Clutching Hand," objected Sid. "His 'nishuls are TCH."

"Yeah," said Owgoost, "that ain't the same — this is . . . let's see . . . TGH."

Danny replied scornfully. "If we'd 'a' made it TCH, you'd have caught on right away! We had to disguise it some, didn't we?"

"I don't get it," said Toby.

"Nor me neither," said Pete.

"I'll tell you," said Danny patiently. "I went over to the Steele Memorial Lib'ary and I looked up a foreign book — was a German dictionary —"

"I know some German," interrupted Owgoost.

"Then you'll understand better'n the others, Owgoost," continued Danny cajolingly, on the theory that flattering the chief threat to their security could do no harm and might do some good. "I couldn't find no word for 'The' in German, so I just used a T. And the German word for 'Hand' was like ours — leastways, it started with the same first letter, H. So I had to find a disguise word for 'Clutching.' But I couldn't find nothing in the whole German language which means clutching. You know anything, Owgoost?"

Owgoost rubbed his downy chin. "Nope — but I could ask my father. He knows all about German stuff."

"Too late now," shrugged Danny. "But remember seeing that clutching hand on the moving picture screen — the shadow of it on the wall? It was always big as a drum almost. So I looked up 'big' in German and I finally found it — Miss Ames the lib'arian pernounced it for me — *grocer*, I think it was. Anyways, it started with a G — so we called our secret club the TGH. That's our secret way of calling it The Clutching Hand."

The new members were properly impressed. The G sure had them fooled — they had never even considered The Clutching Hand as a possible explanation, although most of them visited The Happy Hour every Saturday afternoon.

Then Pidge got a little worried. "Think Miss Ames'll catch on because you asked her to pernounce it, Danny?"

"Naw," said Danny, "I told her it was for some homework I had to do over the summer. She'll believe *anything*, Miss Ames'll."

The entire membership then took oaths never to reveal the secrets of the "si'ety," as Toby pronounced it, to any of the other fellows, and the meeting broke up. Danny, Chad, and Sartorious stayed behind to talk things over.

"Wasn't too bad," mused Sar-

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torious, "having other fellas in the club."

"Yeah," said Chad, "maybe we should have tooken in new members long ago. Fact is, was kind of fun. What do you think, Dan?"

"Yeah, I liked it too. Made the three of us feel more important, sort of. After all, we foundered the club, didn't we? 'Sides, the three of us have got sixty cents all ours. What'll we do with the money?"

"Oh keep it in the clubhouse with all the other things the club owns. Ain't that right, Sart?"

"Sure thing — till we begin spending it. Gee! Twenty cents apiece!"

Danny put the *TResHurY* box on one of the shelves of the whatnot, with the other cigar boxes containing *POsTiGe STaMPs* and *MarBULs* and even more precious assets of the secret society.

Sartorious had begun to sing a mild ragtime version of *Yip-I-Addy-I-Ay*, and Danny had joined in, stridently off key, when Chad broke the spell that was settling on the three boys.

"Say, how about celebrating? How about a few puffs before we beat it home?"

Sartorious stopped in mid-note. "Sure, I'm game."

Danny went back to the whatnot and took down a special box. Significantly, it was the only one not labeled. The box contained a packet of Zig Zag cigarette papers — borrowed by Chad from his father's supply — and also a skein of greenish-gold corn silk, streaked with brown, that the boys had baked in the sun.

Each of them plucked a cigarette paper and some strands of corn silk, and went outside. Danny carefully snapped the padlock on the rickety door — he was responsible for everything in the clubhouse because it was on his father's property — and the three boys sneaked around to the western side of the chicken coop. There they could sit on the ground, backs against the wall, and not be seen from the Nathan house.

They rolled a cigarette each, folding the long hairs of the corn silk and licking the edges of the wrapper, and lit up.

A tinge of night coolness was in the air — an invigorating nip. It was dark and quiet and extraordinarily peaceful. The boys puffed luxuriously, reveling in the sensation of supreme wickedness.

Danny leaned back, his eyes closed, his normally busy brain at rest. He smoked languorously, having no intimation whatever of the disaster scheduled to befall him come morning.

The next morning Danny was the first to reach the TGH clubhouse. He walked absently across the back yard, around the pea patch and past the grape trellis, and noticed nothing wrong until he raised his hand to open the padlock. Then his heart almost split.

The padlock had been tampered with. It had been pulled apart, almost broken in half. Someone had

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invaded the clubhouse during the night!

Danny rushed inside. For a moment he was reassured — everything appeared to be in apple-pie order. The furnishings of the clubhouse seemed undisturbed, the cigar boxes were neatly arranged on the shelves of the whatnot — just as they had been the previous evening.

Danny was puzzled. It didn't make any sense. Why should someone break the lock and not enter the clubhouse? Then a colossal suspicion blossomed inside of him. He dashed over to the whatnot and took down the *TResHurY* box. It looked intact. He lifted the cover.

The *TResHurY* box was empty!

A thief had stolen the sixty cents of initiation fees!

In a flash of intuition Danny knew the bitter truth. The thieves were Mitch and Owgoost, of course! That was why Mitch had whispered to Owgoost when Danny had proposed initiation fees — Mitch had got the idea right then and there. All the boys knew that Danny, Chad, and Sartorious kept a *TResHurY* box in the clubhouse and that in all likelihood the initiation money would be cached in that box, especially with the clubhouse always under lock and key. Sure, that was why Mitch and Owgoost had agreed so readily to the admission of *other* fellows — Danny now remembered Owgoost saying: "And be sure to tell the other fellas to bring their 'nishiation fees too."

It was all as clear as a pikestaff. Mitch and Owgoost had waited until after Danny, Chad, and Sartorious had finished smoking their corn-silk cigarettes and then had broken the padlock and robbed the clubhouse.

At this moment in his melancholy speculations Chad and Sartorious sauntered in. Danny told them the devastating news. They just couldn't believe it. But after they had examined the broken lock and ransacked the clubhouse for the money without success, they sat down with Danny on the earth floor and helped him plumb the depths of despair.

Sartorious groaned. "What are we going to do?"

Chad held out no hope. "What *can* we do? Who's going to stand up and accuse Owgoost of being a thief? *You*, Sart?"

Sartorious rolled his eyes. "Who me? No sir, not me!"

"Sure," continued Chad, "he'd just up and kill you dead — with his bare hands."

Danny was silent. So far as he was concerned, it was the end of the world. A thought had occurred to him, but he was afraid to voice it. Since the clubhouse was in the Nathan back yard, it had always been understood that Danny was personally responsible for everything kept there. Would Chad and Sartorious remember that? And if they did, would they hold Danny to his fearful obligation?

It was so painful a picture that Danny closed his eyes and tried hard not to think.

But after a few moments he felt a

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curious conviction inside of him that he was being stared at. Warily he opened one eye. Sure enough, Chad still had his eyes fastened right on him. He opened the other eye. Sartorious too — for when Danny glanced at him, Sartorious suddenly lowered his head and began to fidget.

They had remembered.

Danny guessed they were being kind to him. They didn't want to come right out and tell him that he would have to make good their share of the stupendous loss.

Danny sat there brooding. The silence dragged on interminably. Finally, Danny couldn't stand it any longer.

"All right, fellas, you don't have to tell me — I know. It's my respon-responsitility because it's my clubhouse and it's on my Pop's property. Listen here, fellas, just give me a little time, will you? Maybe I can find the money — maybe I can trail Mitch and Owgoost and find where they hid the money."

Chad and Sartorious still did not speak. It was significant that neither questioned Danny's theory as to the identity of the culprits — there were no two ways about it.

"Give me till to-night — just till to-night — and if I don't find the money, I promise to bring twenty cents of my own money to each of you."

Even as he made the promise, Danny's heart fluttered like a sparrow with a broken wing. Yes, it must surely be the end of the world. He wouldn't have been the slightest bit surprised if suddenly he heard the sound of Gabriel's horn come shooting down at him from out of the heavens.

"What do you say, fellas? Will you give me a little time?"

Chad coughed. "Sure, Danny, I don't mind waiting."

"Me too," mumbled Sartorious, "take all the time you want till to-night."

And Chad and Sartorious left Danny to his own private misery.

Danny determined not to give up. He would lie in wait for Mitch and shadow him, and maybe Mitch would lead him to the stolen money. Danny wished he had a detective's outfit — a set of false whiskers, a shiny nickel-plated badge, and a pair of handcuffs — then he'd show 'em! But without the official equipment of a Sherlock Holmes or a Craig Kennedy or a Nick Carter he would have to do the best he could.

He went to the front porch and hid behind his father's rocking-chair — the largest one on the porch. He kept his eyes fixed on the house diagonally across the street — the house Mitch lived in.

Almost an hour passed and Mitch didn't come outside. Danny hoped he wasn't sick or something — although it would have served him right, the dirty thief-o! Danny's little bandy legs got tired from the cramped position and he was beginning to wonder if he had decided on the cor-

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rect tactics when Mitch suddenly appeared on the porch across the way.

Mitch vaulted the low picket fence in front of his house and then strolled down High Street toward John. He walked slowly and confidently, as if he had nothing whatever on his mind. Danny couldn't help thinking: "Ain't he got a guilty conscience? Ain't it preying like all fury on his mind?" And then Danny remembered something he had read in a dime novel: a criminal always returns to the scene of his crime. For a moment Danny was in a panic. He sure hoped Owgoost and Mitch wouldn't return to the clubhouse — not while the other fellows were away!

When Mitch was almost up to the intersection of High and John, Danny made his first move. He slid off the porch and tiptoed down High Street, taking full advantage of every tree and hedge. When Mitch crossed the street and started down John, past Tobias's Dry Goods Store, Danny began running. He reached the corner just as Mitch passed Mr. Herman's shoe-repairing shop and turned into Barnaby's Lane.

Abandoning the aid of all natural cover, Danny sped down John Street, going so fast that he couldn't stop by the time he reached the lane and flung himself into it — to find Mitch waiting for him!

Mitch grabbed Danny's skinny neck.

"What do you think you're doing, squirt-o? You *foll'in* me?"

Danny spluttered. "Nothing — of the kind — Mitch old pal! I'm just — I'm just running, that's all! Honor bright!"

Mitch bored hard into Danny's deep brown eyes. Then he shrugged. "Okay, just don't try any stunt like following me, little runt-o, or Owgoost and me'll —"

He left the threat unfinished and shoved Danny away.

Mitch then walked down the lane, casting occasional glances over his shoulder. Danny kept a respectful distance behind him until the suspect disappeared into the barn. Then Danny put on another burst of speed and raced around to the back of the barn where he knew of a wide gap between two of the weather-beaten boards.

He pressed his face against the crack in the wall — as close as his big round eyeglasses would permit — but all he could see was the dim figure of Mitch in the suspicious act of looking around to see if anyone was watching him. Then, apparently reassured, Mitch bent over in one of the corners of the barn and scrabbled around in the loose hay. Was he hiding something? Or was he perhaps retrieving something? Could it be the stolen money that Mitch and Owgoost might have hidden in the barn the previous night, after they had robbed the clubhouse?

Danny muttered to himself. "I wish I knowed . . . I only wish I knowed. This being a detective ain't so easy as I thought." No, sir — there were too many doubts, too many un-

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known factors. "'Sides," Danny decided, "if you're a detective — a real live detective — you just can't go and guess at things. You got to *know!*"

He saw Mitch straighten up, brush some scraps of hay off his clothes, and leave the barn. He had something tightly clutched in his right hand. Through the crack Danny could follow Mitch's progress up the lane until he turned into John Street.

Immediately Danny ran to the front of the barn and made for the corner in which Mitch had bent over so mysteriously. Danny got down on his hands and knees, searched the floor of the barn, and sifted through the loose hay; but he found nothing — no clue, no evidence, nothing at all. He sat there a while, wondering what to do next. What would a real detective do? Seek out Owgoost, the other suspect, and trail him? No, what good would that do? What could he hope to accomplish against Owgoost?

Finally, Danny rose. He was so despondent now that he didn't even bother to brush off his knickerbocker pants or shake the wisps of hay from his Norfolk jacket. He was too despondent to do anything but slouch out of the barn and head for home across the back yards.

But as Danny was just about to pass the rear corner of the barn he caught a glimpse of Owgoost entering the lane at John Street. Owgoost was coming to the barn too! Was fate playing into Danny's hands? He quickly took his post again, his eyes nailed to the crack in the barn wall.

Owgoost entered the barn and like Mitch went straight to a corner. But it was a different corner. Then, just as Mitch had done, Owgoost bent over and seemed to pick up something hidden under the scattered hay. This time, because it was a different corner — a corner lighted by a slant of sun — Danny could see what was in Owgoost's hand. It was a small leather pouch with a draw string — a marble bag.

Owgoost opened the mouth of the bag and shook the contents into the palm of his left hand.

Glints of sunlight sparkled in Owgoost's palm. They caught the shiny surfaces of two dimes and two nickels.

Thirty cents!

Exactly the amount that would represent a half share of the stolen money!

Here was the proof to Danny — the positive proof — that Owgoost was one of the thieves! No doubt about it now — Owgoost and Mitch had raided the clubhouse treasury. Nor was there any further doubt that they had hidden the stolen money in the barn late last night and that Mitch had collected his share only a few minutes ago.

Danny's hunch had been a perfect bull's-eye!

Owgoost was still standing in the barn, gloating over his share of the loot.

But what should Danny do? Should he rush into the barn, accuse Owgoost

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of being a thief, point to the evidence in Owgoost's possession, and demand the money back? True, he had caught Owgoost red-handed, but — but —

For the first time Danny understood how really enormous Owgoost was. Standing there, half in sunlight, half in shadow, he seemed even bigger and brawnier than ever. And Danny remembered vividly how a single blow from Owgoost's fist had given him a black eye the morning before. What would Owgoost do to him if he charged the big bully with having committed a crime?

Suddenly Danny's spindle legs turned to water. His heart began to pound so hard that he wondered why Owgoost didn't hear it, even through the wall of the barn.

And then Danny knew the truth.

He just couldn't do it.

He just couldn't go into the barn, face Owgoost, and risk the consequences.

He just didn't have the courage.

At last Danny turned around and left the barn — left Owgoost in undisputed possession of what was really Danny's money. He trudged home, hating his puny body and his puny heart. He hated everything about himself — his weak eyes, his weak muscles, his weak will. He even hated his house, which suddenly looked unkempt and forlorn. How true it is — how bitter true! — that no enemy can do a boy the harm he does himself, or heap upon his frail and fluttering soul half the anguish he himself heaps upon it . . .

With his feet dragging, Danny entered the Nathan house by the side door. He climbed wearily to the second floor, went into his bedroom, locked the door behind him, and pulled down the blind. The room was dark and still. He fell full-length on his cold iron bed.

For a while his brain was dead. He couldn't think. Then he began to peck away at his predicament. Wasn't there *something* he could possibly do to prevent such a staggering loss? For two long hours he studied every aspect of the situation. He conceived a dozen different schemes, but after serious consideration he was forced to discard every one of them.

If he could only devise some plan — some startling coup — that would pluck victory out of the burr patch of defeat! He had done it so many times in the past — but on this day every resource of his imagination failed him.

Indeed, it was his imagination that was really his undoing. Every time he saw a glimmer of an idea, he also saw a vision of Owgoost standing in the barn, his huge shadow stretched ominously on the barn floor. And whenever a spark lit in his fevered brain, it was promptly snuffed out by that dark, terrifying shadow of Owgoost and his big, brawny fists.

Late in the afternoon, still lying on his bed, Danny knew that it was hopeless.

He was licked.

He got up slowly, went to the loose board in his bedroom floor where he

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hid his savings, took out — with such pain! — his precious hoard, counted forty cents in dimes, nickels, and pennies, replaced the board and the hooked rug, and went out into the sad and silent street.

He visited Chad first, and gave him one dime, one nickel, and five pennies.

Chad took the money almost apologetically — but he took it. If Danny had any lingering hope that maybe, perhaps, possibly Chad would hold their undying friendship on a higher plane than mere monetary obligations, this last hope was crushed. But Chad did offer a scrap of consolation.

"Tell you what, Danny," said Chad, "I'll pitch in and help you pay for a new padlock."

Danny smiled wanly. He was grateful for even small favors.

Then he went over to Sartorious's house and handed his other best friend one dime, one nickel, and five pennies.

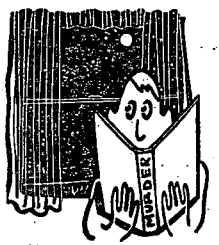
Sartorious was also uncomfortable — but he too accepted the money.

Danny let out a deep sigh and remarked as casually as he could: "Chad said as how he was willing to help pay for a new lock."

Sartorious rose to the bait: "You can count on me too, Danny. I'll be glad to chip in — if it don't cost too much."

Danny was thankful for any bits and pieces he could save out of the wreckage.

As he walked slowly homeward, Danny looked around him and everything seemed unfamiliar — the street, the trees, even his own house. Suddenly he felt like a stranger in a strange land, and the golden summer was wrinkled, hard, and empty, like an old walnut shell. And then, for the first time, he realized something else: that he had no one to blame for his overwhelming sadness, no one in the whole wide world — except himself . . .



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V THE CELLINI SALTCELLAR

by MICHAEL INNES

"CELLINI'S SALTCELLAR?" AS HE SAT down opposite Lord Funtington, Inspector Appleby showed surprise. "Isn't that in Vienna?"

"You're thinking of the big one." Lord Funtington was impatient. "Ours is much smaller, but the workmanship is quite as good. Cellini made it for Pope Clement VII, as he did many of his finest things. It's been in my family for quite a long time. The second earl bought it along with some other Medici treasures. You've heard of the Funtington Signorellis and the Funtington Piero?"

Appleby nodded. "Certainly. I've seen them in New York."

Lord Funtington flushed faintly. "No doubt. We've been obliged to part, you know, with a number of our things. But we still have the Cellini saltcellar. Or we did have it — until last night."

"It's been stolen?"

Lord Funtington hesitated. "It's gone. The matter may be delicate. Discretion is needed, my dear Sir John. That's why I'm uncommonly glad you have been able to come along yourself."

"Discretion is something one has to be rather discreet about." Appleby offered this stonily. "May I have the facts?" He was a trifle annoyed.

"My wife gave a party last night," said Funtington, "and we played — well, some rather childish games. You will understand that only intimate friends were present — not more than eighty guests."

"I see. A very cosy gathering. And the games?"

"The games involved scampering all over the house. And for the last one we turned off all the lights. I needn't bother you with explaining it."

Appleby nodded. "As to that, I'm quite willing to remain in the dark for the moment. And the saltcellar?"

"There was rum punch and hot chestnuts going, and we thought it would be rather fun really to use Cellini's piece. So we placed it beside the chestnuts on a table in the gray drawing-room."

"I see." Appleby, who had been making notes, took off his glasses and stared at Lord Funtington very hard. "You asked some eighty people into this house, showed them a pocketable object of enormous value, and then turned off all the lights. Am I to understand that when the lights came on again it was with immense surprise that you discovered the saltcellar had vanished?"

Lord Funtington frowned. "I'm

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dashed if I quite like your tone. But the thing was certainly gone."

"What did you do?"

"At the moment I did nothing. Or rather I consulted my wife, and we agreed that nothing could be done. There was an exalted personage present, you see, and also several distinguished foreigners. There was nothing to do but pretend not to notice, and get in touch with the police — with yourself, in fact — afterward."

"I suppose you've also got in touch with your insurance people?"

"Oh, of course. That goes without saying."

Appleby nodded grimly. "I've no doubt it does."

"But now I'm deucedly uneasy." Lord Funtington hesitated once more, and rather distractedly reached for a silver cigarette box. "Smoke? I keep on forgetting, since I don't myself. Now, what was I saying? Ah, yes. The party was only friends, as I've said — rather, friends and relations."

"Quite so." Appleby had known investigations to drift this way before. "In fact, you believe that one of your own —"

The sentence remained unfinished. For a door had been flung open and Lady Funtington, pale and agitated, strode into the room.

She took one glance at the two men, and appeared to divine the situation in a flash. "Charles," she cried, "you must drop it. The disgrace would be unthinkable. I implore you to send that gentleman away."

Appleby, who had stood up, smiled faintly at this note of melodrama. "I'm afraid I can't be sent away, Lady Funtington. Your husband has called in the police, and I think he has communicated with his insurance company — the equivalent of making formal claim. Isn't that so, sir?"

Funtington, who had also risen, moved uneasily. "My wife is right. I regret this."

"Perhaps you do." Appleby spoke softly. "But I am afraid it is now your duty to speak what is in your mind."

Funtington had walked moodily to a window. When he turned round, it was to speak with a sudden and unexpected savagery. "Very well! Rupert Strade is in my mind. The name will tell you that he is my first cousin, damn him. And he's much less my friend than my wife's. He got back from some crazy wanderings in Italy a week ago, dead broke. And his record won't bear —"

"Stop!" Lady Funtington was now looking at her husband in naked fury. Appleby kept still. This sort of fracas was also sadly familiar to him. "It's mean and horrible. Rupert —"

"No doubt, my dear, you don't relish any inquiry about Rupert." Lord Funtington gave a smile that Appleby judged extraordinarily ugly. "But one cat is out of the bag, anyway. If your precious friend stole his own mother's diamonds, it's surely likely enough that he wouldn't stop at pocketing a bit of a mere cousin's plate."

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"But he took the diamonds when he was a mere boy!" Lady Funtington was desperate. "And even if —"

"May I interrupt?" There was something in Appleby's voice that made the excited husband and wife fall silent at once. "Lord Funtington, you had something to say about discretion. Well, I doubt whether it will be discreet to go on discussing the matter in this way. I have a practical measure to recommend."

Lord Funtington produced a silk handkerchief and nervously dabbed his forehead. "Then recommend it."

"I can have half a dozen skilled men here in ten minutes. I propose that they search this house."

"Search my house!" Lord Funtington was pale with anger.

"Certainly. It is an indispensable first step on any premises from which an article of value is reported to have vanished."

"Then search and be damned!"

"Thank you. And may I ask you both to meet me here three hours from now?"

The saltcellar, Appleby thought, was undoubtedly a magnificent thing. It had been fitted with a glass lining to which some grains of salt still adhered. He turned it in his hands so that the jewels and enamel gleamed again. And then he looked mildly at the Funtingtons across the table. "I'm glad it was so easy," he said. "To tell you the truth, sir, your dressing-room was the first place I told my men to have a go at."

Lord Funtington sprang up with a cry. He had every appearance of a man who has received a staggering shock. "How dare you, sir! This is a monstrous impertinence — a disgraceful trick."

"It may certainly be the latter." Appleby tapped the glittering saltcellar before him. "It's easier to play tricks with than a Piero or a Signorelli." Appleby turned to Lady Funtington. "I am afraid that this must be very painful to you. And I am also afraid that we are not yet at the bottom of it. Do you know what I have here?" He picked up a small object from the table and held it out before him. "I found this wedged between the glass and the gold."

Lady Funtington leaned forward, bewildered. "It appears to be a match — a sort of wax match. But an unusually small one."

"Precisely. And it brings Mr. Rupert Strade into the picture, after all. This sort of smoker's match is far smaller than anything commonly used in England. It comes, as a matter of fact, from Italy, where it is called a *cerino*. And Mr. Strade returned from Italy only last week. I don't think he gave these matches to your husband, for Lord Funtington doesn't smoke. . . . Ah, here is what I have been waiting for." Appleby paused as a constable entered and placed a black garment on the table before him. "The gentleman didn't object, Joyce?"

"No, sir — said you were welcome. Amused, he seemed to be."

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"Thank you." Appleby waited until the man had gone. "Mr. Strade's dinner jacket." He turned the right-hand pocket inside out. "I thought so. Salt."

Lady Funtington stared at the tiny white pile.

"You mean that Rupert really did —?"

"Yes, Lady Funtington. He pocketed the saltcellar. But he did so guessing that it had been a temptation which Lord Funtington deliberately set in the way of his old weakness. Into the motive of that, we needn't enter. Mr. Strade then made his way through the house under cover of darkness, and left the saltcellar where Lord Funtington would have some difficulty in accounting for it when it turned up. It would look, in fact, as if your husband were doing his own thieving with an eye on defrauding his insurance company."

Appleby rose. "Neither gentleman can be said to have behaved well. But I must say that I prefer the reprisal to the original blackguardly plot."

NEXT MONTH . . .

Winner of a Second Prize —

WADE MILLER's *A Bad Time of Day*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **BETHEL LAURENCE**

TITLE: ***You Are Going to Die***

TYPE: Suspense Story

LOCALE: Greenwich Village, New York City

COMMENTS: ✓ *An unknown man kept phoning Ann Mason at all hours of the night, always repeating that terrible message . . . Martha Foley ranked this as one of the 29 best short stories to appear in American magazines during 1951.*

THE BELL WAS RINGING AGAIN. THE room was dark, and there seemed to be nothing in it but the swelling of the bell and its reverberations in her body. And then again. And over and over and over again.

She had been asleep when the telephone had begun to ring. She had seemed to recognize it at first in the pit of her stomach and then later with her ears.

Now she began to whimper. She was on her stomach, her elbows bent, her arms pressing against her ears, her body taut and still except for the spasms which shook her middle.

She turned over and sat up in bed. She lifted the strands of short blonde hair and removed the little pieces of cotton that had been pushed into her ears. Reaching down, she picked up the quilted, satin house coat which lay at the foot of the bed. She pulled it around her tightly, not because she was cold, but because it seemed to offer her protection.

She got up and walked to the telephone. It was just a plain, squat, red hand-phone, yet it seemed to have taken on character. She looked at it and waited, and then she lifted the receiver and said, "Hello."

It was his voice, low and slow and monotonous.

She listened. The first time it happened she had put down the receiver and cut the connection. Now she often thought of cutting him off again, but somehow she always stayed on listening. She never said anything but her initial, "Hello." Even that was unnecessary. He knew who would be

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there. She knew who would be calling. His last remark she never answered. When he said, "May I come up now, Ann?" she felt the heat flooding her face and the perspiration coming through to the satin house coat. And that was when she would put the receiver down, gently into its cradle.

Tonight was the same. Unhurriedly, quietly, "You are going to die, Ann," he said. "You know that, don't you? It will be very horrible. I would like to tell you more about it." She waited until he had asked his question, "May I come up now, Ann?" and then she clicked the phone, cutting off the sound of him, yet still hearing him because the words were there, familiarly clinging to her like the perspiration on the house coat.

She started to walk toward the door and then she thought, No, I won't do it. I won't try the lock again. I've tried it four times and I know that it is locked and I won't indulge myself again.

She went to the wall and started to press the light switch, and then she thought, No, I won't do that either. He might be standing out there on the street, waiting to identify the apartment, attempting to spy on me. She wanted to creep to the window and peer out into the narrow, gray, only half-illumined street of Greenwich Village to see if he really might be waiting there, but she was afraid that a flashlight might flare up from the street below onto her face. So she went to the sofa, the one that did not open into a bed, and she sat there in the dark, shivering in her heat.

She tried not to think of the things he had said, but the words were swarming all over her. For the hundredth time she tried to imagine — who was this man? And why was he calling her? What did it mean? And why was it happening? And then again and again she tried to tell herself that no, it was not true; she was not growing mad.

"*You are going to die*," the words had said.

And there was no one but her to hear them. No one to swear that they were being said, to share their terrible secrecy or to help her if they were true.

She got up and walked back to bed. She lay there, still thinking of his words until the imagined sound of the telephone drowned them out and then the words surged back, drowning out the telephone. Then she turned over on her stomach and pressed her palms deep, deeper, into the flesh of her ears . . .

When the light came in through the window next morning, she got up and went to the end of the room and closed the window without looking out. She fixed her breakfast and began to dress; then she went to the telephone and called her office and told them that she would be an hour late for work that morning. She was nervous and she knew it, and she had a sore spot in her stomach where her excitement had concentrated and her

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girdle now pressed against it and antagonized it.

She was dressed in her light blue suit; it was sleek and fitted, a Sunday suit, but she thought that wearing it might help to assuage her nervousness. She pulled the comb tightly through her short blonde hair, trying to force into place the curls that she had ruffled through the night. Her blue eyes looked deeper for lack of sleep, and the usually perfect bow of her mouth had a jagged rise where her hand had slipped with the lipstick. She erased and redrew it as best she could, and then she walked outside, down to the street.

She walked two blocks, turning off into a little side street where she entered a door and stood by a high counter until a man in police uniform came up and asked her what she wanted.

Her chest was constricted as though she were about to tell a lie.

"Lafferty," she said. "Detective Lafferty."

A short man with a round face and a rounded stomach came out. All his features were round and even his hands gave that effect.

"Yes?" he said.

"Lieutenant Lafferty," she began, "I'm Miss Mason. I've spoken to you on the telephone."

He looked at her blankly. "Yes? Won't you come in?"

She followed him through a hallway into a smaller room and sat down on a chair next to a desk.

"Now, what was it about?"

She sat straight, her feet in a line, her knees strained together. "I live down here in the Village," she said. "Just two blocks away. I telephoned you a couple of weeks ago about some phone calls I've been receiving. Don't you remember?"

His face looked undecided.

"Threats," she said. "No, not threats exactly. Information. I am going to die." Small circles of moisture appeared on her face. "A man keeps calling up and saying I am going to die. At all hours of the night."

"Ah, yes," he said. "I remember which one you are now."

She held her eyes down as though afraid he might ask her to repeat what she had just found so difficult to say.

"So, he's still calling?"

"Yes. He is."

"Well —" He moved toward the chair facing the desk. He sat down on it. "I'll tell you frankly, Miss Mason, there is very little we can do about it."

She rubbed her hands against the soft leather of her purse.

"We have several similar cases right now, but our hands are rather tied on them." He swung his chair around, confronting her. "You see, unfortunately with these dial phones, the connection is broken the minute he hangs up, so there is no way of tracing the call."

She nodded her head and looked at her nail marks on the leather bag.

"However, there are several things that I might suggest." He twisted a pencil slowly between his fingers. "One is that you simply ignore the

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phone at these hours. That would be the simplest method. Nerve-racking, maybe — but simple."

"I know," she said. "I've thought of that. But you see, Lieutenant, I have a sister who lives in Wilmington. She's very ill. They might call me at any time. I keep thinking, this may be the time. And then I have to get up and answer that telephone."

"Oh, I see." There was a long pause. He switched the pencil to the other hand. "Miss Mason," he said, eyeing her speculatively from behind the point of the pencil, "before we go any further with this case, there is one thing which we must ascertain. Are you absolutely positive that you don't know who this man could be?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, I am."

"Are you absolutely positive that no one, to your knowledge, would want you to die?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, I swear it!"

His eyes rested on her again for a second. "You're an extremely attractive young woman. It's not unlikely that you would have — admirers — jealousy, no doubt —"

"I'm afraid you don't understand, Lieutenant." She leaned forward, clutching the purse. "I'm fairly new in town. It's not easy meeting young men in a city so large." She tried to keep the regret from creeping into her voice. "No. I'm afraid there is no love life. No complications."

His right eyebrow lifted higher than his left.

"I know what you're thinking." The small circles of moisture spread into one large pool on her face. "But I wouldn't be fool enough to lie to you, Lieutenant, when I'm so very frightened."

"Very well." He seemed satisfied now. "Then I still think as I did before that you're the victim of some prankster. I can only tell you this — it is not uncommon. Single women, Miss Mason, who are listed in the phone book like that, are quite often the target of calls from jokesters, cranks, and lunatics. In practically none of these cases would the offenders actually resort to any form of action. They're simply telephone-happy you might say. It's unfortunate — but true, and we're in a bad spot with them. We get hundreds of these cases. . . ."

"Well, that isn't very satisfactory," she said, "when you're the target."

"On the other hand, it isn't entirely hopeless. There are several things I might suggest. One is that you get a friend to stay with you. Arrange with a neighbor to get into your apartment. When he calls you, hold him on the phone, get the friend to call here on the other phone and we can check into the conversation and trace it back."

She held her purse in front of her hands to conceal the fact that they were quivering. "That would be awfully complicated," she said. "I don't know if I could arrange it."

"Well, we could give you another number and keep you out of the book — a private number, known only to your friends."

"But, Lieutenant," she said, "prac-

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tically the only friends I have are from out of town. They come to town and try to call me. No one could ever reach me then."

He shrugged his shoulders.

". . . And besides, Lieutenant —" She leaned toward him. "He should be punished. He —" She stopped and caught her breath; then she spoke a little more slowly. "What I'm trying to say is, after all, if this man has my telephone number he also has my address. He might be lurking outside my door. He might actually be planning to kill me. The very least he's trying to do is to drive me out of my mind! The very least —"

The detective stared at her for a minute. "Well, there's only one way I know of catching him, Miss Mason." He stopped twirling the pencil. "And that might be very difficult. It would require a lot of cooperation on your part and a lot of —" He stopped himself. "Shall we say — courage, Miss Mason?" He smiled. "That's it, courage."

She looked at him.

"That would require your asking the man to come up to your apartment the next time he asks you. Then telephone me immediately. I promise to get there right away."

Her lips parted, showing her teeth.

"If I'm not here, the other man will come. I'll leave instructions. In all probability the man has no intentions whatever of actually coming. And certainly not of killing you. This will simply scare him away for good. In any event, we're only two blocks away. Even if he's right across the street from you, not much could happen in that length of time."

Her lips parted farther.

"At any rate," he told her, "this is all I can suggest. We have no other method of coping with the thing. Of course, it requires a lot of — did we say, courage, Miss Mason? — to handle the situation. Do you think that you could handle it, Miss Mason?"

Her nails dug deeper into the leather bag. "I — I don't know. I don't know if I could go through with it or not. I'm afraid." She stood up. "I could try though. I could always try. I'll have to think about it though. I could let you know."

She held out her hand. "Thank you very much. You'll hear from me. You'll surely hear from me." She started out the door. Then she turned back. "Lieutenant," she said. "You'll be there? Or the other gentleman? You'll surely be there? You won't leave me stranded?"

He smiled. "I promise you, Miss Mason. I can promise you that."

"All right," she said. "Goodbye, Lieutenant." She went out the door.

The room was still that night. He didn't call. But she slept almost as poorly as if he had. She lay in the bed and waited for him. But the next night she fell asleep after midnight, and that was when he called.

She heard the ringing of the telephone and she put on her house coat and went to answer it. She held the instrument to her ear and listened.

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She waited until he said, "May I come up now, Ann?" Her lips parted loosely and so did her teeth. But she couldn't speak, she couldn't form the words. She hung up without asking him.

She went back to the bed and she lay there thinking how fortunate it was for her that she hadn't been able to ask him. For you never could tell what might have happened. She shuddered and covered her eyes and tried not to imagine what might have happened. She felt sick with fear and revulsion and the horrible loneliness of having even your aloneness threatened.

Three nights passed before he called again. Each night she sat up and waited for him, not even making the studio couch into a bed, just sitting up with her clothes on, sometimes making herself a spiked cup of tea, sometimes knitting on a sweater, but most of the time just sitting there, waiting for the telephone to ring.

By the time she lifted the receiver on the third night, she was almost anxious to speak with him. She had cleared her throat before going to the telephone. When he said, "May I come up now, Ann?" she hesitated, and then said, "Yes." There was not a normal amount of voice there, but there was enough to be audible. He didn't say anything. He just hung up. The conversation on his part was no different from usual. The entire conversation had been no different from usual, except that she had said, "Yes," in a voice fairly audible.

The detective's number was written on a slip of paper beside the telephone and she dialed the number and told him what had happened. Then she went into the dressing room to put away the pearl brooch that her mother had left to her. Her hands were restless and seeking for action, so she went into the bathroom to wash out some clothes. And all the while she was thinking, He won't come. He certainly will never come. He certainly doesn't intend to come here.

There was a knock at the door, a soft, considerate knock. She wasn't sure that she had really heard it. She turned off the water. There was a knock again. She put the undergarments, still dry, back into the hamper, closed the lid and put the soap flakes and scouring powder back into place. She went toward the door, starting to turn around, wanting to run back to the bathroom and lock herself in.

She walked into the foyer and opened the door. He was standing there.

She thought, It isn't too late. I could still slam the door. And then she looked up at the boy. He was tall, very tall, and young. He was under thirty, just a few years older than she. His nose turned up; it was childish, undeveloped. His hair waved nicely. He had no particular coloring in either his eyes or his hair or his skin. His mouth was wide and fleshy. It didn't seem possible to her that he could have spoken the way he did until she looked at the deep fleshiness of his lips, and then she could picture the voice coming out of them and the words running over them.

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"Won't you come in?" she said.

He walked through the doorway.

"Won't you sit down?" she said.

He looked around the living room, and then he sat down on the studio couch that opened into a bed.

She sat on the chair opposite him, nearer the door.

"The buzzer," she said. "It didn't buzz from downstairs. How did you get in?"

"Oh, a lady let me in. She had her key, so she let me in with her. She said I had an honest face."

She smiled and then stopped quickly, staring at his face. "What's your name?" she asked him.

"George."

Her head felt light, light as paper. "George," she repeated.

"That's right." He smiled at her. The smile was young, even younger than his voice; his voice was more alive than it had been on the telephone. She began to wonder if perhaps this were the wrong boy; if perhaps he had been sent by someone else.

"You didn't think I would come?" he asked.

"No. No, I — "

"I almost didn't. It was Arthur," he said.

"Arthur? Arthur?" She relaxed a little against the back of the chair. Then there actually had been some other person; George was not altogether responsible. Perhaps he was not responsible at all. This made it easier, somehow, to be in the same room with him. For it was Arthur, the unseen, who was at the root of all this. Her mind was fuzzy and confused, and yet it seemed right that it should not be this boy. It was the unknown Arthur with whom she had to contend. She sat there watching him, surprised at herself for thinking at a time like this that perhaps if he were just a boy, a nice boy whom she had met at a party or somewhere . . .

"That's right." He gazed at her; he seemed to be admiring her. "You're a very attractive girl," he said, "to be living here all alone —"

The room was warm and she didn't want to walk past him to open the window. She rubbed her hands together. "I — I don't understand," she said. "This — Arthur? And you . . . you don't look . . . that is, you don't act — I don't understand," she said.

"Perhaps I could explain."

"Yes!" Her whole face was eager. She leaned forward, waiting. For now there would follow, of course, some logical explanation. She had the same feeling of relief which she sometimes experienced while trying to awaken herself from a dream. Knowing that there was, after all, some goal of reality, some reasonable escape, if only she could pull hard enough.

"Yes," she was saying. "Yes! Perhaps you could. Please. Please."

He grinned at her again.

Her body was stretching toward him. "You didn't say those things? It wasn't really you?"

"Well —"

"You'll have to talk faster. We haven't got all night."

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He crossed his legs, still grinning. "Why not? I figure we have."

"No." She sat back. "No. You'll have to take my word for it. You'll just have —"

His eyes distended. He jumped up. "I get it. I'll be going." He headed for the door.

"No!"

He stopped and turned toward her, holding out his hand. "Then give me the keys."

"No. It isn't that. The door's not locked." She could see the door keys lying, as they always lay when she was home, on the table nearest the door. "It's just that —" She stood up. "If you go now, there's sure to be trouble. But if you stay —" She walked toward him. "If you *really* weren't the one who said those things, if you could explain, then maybe I — I —"

There was movement in his eyes, in his body, back and forth, from her to the door.

His face relaxed. "To tell the truth," he said, "it would be darn silly for me to run away. I haven't anything to hide. And if I run away, they might think I have. But this way, I can explain."

"Yes." Her breathing was lighter. "I'm sure you can."

He walked back to his chair.

The buzzer sounded. For the downstairs door. She remembered then that she had not told the detective about that downstairs door; she had forgotten to give him the key.

There was no color in the boy's face except for a red spot on each cheek where the blood had gathered. He sat down slowly on the edge of one of the chairs.

"Honestly, Miss Mason," he said. "Arthur, he's my roommate, he and I just pulled this thing as sort of a lark." His eyes moved to hers. "You'll have to believe that. We didn't stop to think that maybe you'd take it seriously and call the cops. We —"

"Oh." Her breathing was still lighter. "Then it wasn't you. It was Arthur I spoke to. I'm so glad."

"You see, when we got back from the Army things were —"

"Oh, you were in the Army."

"Yes." He moved forward, covering less of the seat. "Well, things were pretty dull around here, and then one night we were sitting around and talking about psychology and people going mad and things like that. And Arthur said, why anybody could drive anybody mad. It was very simple. Fear, he said. Fear could drive anybody mad. Fear of death. I said that it was a lot of tommyrot and Arthur said that he could prove it. 'Take anybody,' he said. 'Take —' "

The buzzer sounded again.

George turned to look at the button on the wall. "And then we picked you out of the phone book and —"

She was staring at his face. Very carefully. Then she got up and went over to the wall and pressed the buzzer.

"But honestly, Miss Mason — Ann," he said. He followed her. "We didn't mean any harm by it. Hon-

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estly." He touched her on the shoulder. "I didn't think that it would really hurt anybody. And Arthur seemed to get such a big bang out of it. We were buddies in the Army and —"

"It's nice you were in the Army," she said.

He looked down at her, his head cocked to one side, his eyebrows lifted, his eyes searching. "It will never happen again. Please believe me," he said. He held up his right hand. "Before God," he said.

She stood there watching him, surprised at herself for thinking at a time like this that perhaps if he were just a boy, a nice boy whom she had met at a party or somewhere . . . .

There was a knock at the door.

She met his eyes and they looked straight down, studying her.

"Before God," he whispered.

She took his hand and led him into the bathroom and then went through the foyer and opened the door.

Lieutenant Lafferty was standing there; she had hoped it might be the other detective. He was breathing hard. "What happened?" he said.

"Oh, I — I was — was —" she waved her fingers. "Indisposed," she said.

He glanced around the room. "Where is he?"

"He?" She looked at the detective's round fat stomach and she thought how silly to be afraid of a man with a comedian's stomach. "Oh, he didn't come. You were right about it."

The detective turned and stared at her. The blood flowed in waves through her body. "He'll never come now. I'm sure he won't," she said.

He tapped his hat against his knee. "Well, maybe he'll come later. Maybe he hasn't got here yet. I'd better stick around."

"Oh, no. No!" She could hear her heart pounding. "I'm sure he's not coming. He said five minutes. He said, 'I'll be up in five minutes.' So I'm sure he's not coming."

"Well, as long as I'm here —"

"No. Please." She was walking him back to the door. "I'm tired and I'm nervous and I do want to go to bed. I'm beginning to feel ill. Nothing can happen now, I'm sure. Good night, Lieutenant, and thank you very, very much." She held out her hand.

"All right, Miss Mason. Good night. I'll stick around outside for a few minutes to see that everything is all right, and then I'll phone you when I get back to the station. I'm glad that fellow turned out to be a false alarm for your sake. Get some rest now."

He went out, putting on his hat.

She waited until she heard him getting into the elevator, and then she went to the door of the bathroom. "You can come out now, George," she said.

The door to the bathroom opened and George walked toward her.

"You'd better leave," she told him.

"All right," he said, "if that's the way you want it."

He stood there.

"You'd better leave," she said again. "The detective is going to call

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in five minutes; I want to be telling the truth when I say you're not here. I've lied enough for you tonight." She was suddenly drained and exhausted.

"Sure thing," he said. He walked toward the door and she put her head in her hands in relief. "I don't want to bother you any more," he said. "Especially after you've been so swell."

When he got to the door, he turned around. "I don't know what to say, Ann. Except that it really was swell of you. And we certainly didn't mean any harm." He turned around when he got to the door. "You see, you'll have to try and understand. It's just Arthur's ego or something. He seems to have this feeling that he has an unusual influence on people, and then he just has to try it out every once in a while." His hand was on the knob.

"Well," she said uneasily. "Well."

"Anyway, I'd like you to know that we do appreciate what you've just done. I — I'd like to apologize for both of us, for the trouble we've caused you, and to assure you that it certainly won't happen again. I—" He stood there for a minute. "I guess I really don't know what else to say." He held out his hand. She took it.

"Good night, Ann." He went out.

She waited to hear the latch click before she turned and walked away.

She sat down on the couch and supported her head against the pillows; then she got up and took the pillows off and started making the couch into a bed.

The phone rang and it was the Lieutenant. "He's not here," she told him. "Thanks for your concern. I think that this will be the end of him now. Thanks again, Lieutenant. Good night."

She finished making the bed and climbed into it without even cleansing her face. Her body was limp; she was too tired to think of the boy and talking to him had somehow taken the meaning from the calls and the words.

It was all over now, the fright and the feeling of helplessness and the nagging, insidious awareness that she was slowly losing her reason. She could forget the whole thing now. The telephone calls soon would become no more than an incident, relegated to the back of her mind, remembered only occasionally.

She felt relaxed and comforted and she fell asleep like that.

When she awakened it was still dark and the air lay lethargically over the room. There was the sharp, clear sound of a mouse or of a key scraping against a lock. She listened, not quite believing. Then she raised her spine to the pillow and her hand shot forward and turned on the lamp beside her bed. Her eyes sought out the table where the door keys had lain.

There was an ashtray there and the smooth surface of the wood and the shine of yesterday's polish. And nothing more . . .

Her arms fell limply back to the bed and her back crouched against her arms, and she lay like that in frozen silence, her eyes bulging with terror, watching the door as it began slowly to move toward her.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ROY VICKERS**

TITLE: ***A Toy for Jiffy***

TYPE: Inverted Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Inspector Rason

LOCALE: London

TIME: 1944–1950

COMMENTS: *How a man of good family made one mistake, sank to the level of "spiv," made another mistake . . . and then, five years later, felt the long arm of the Department of Dead Ends. Remarkable "suspension of disbelief."*

IN THE MOST CIVILIZED COUNTRIES the procedure in the criminal courts permits every circumstance in the prisoner's favor to be brought out and properly considered. In England — though it is painful to admit it — this does not apply to trial for murder. British law acknowledges two points of favor only — reasonable doubt whether the accused did in fact commit the murder, and, alternatively, proof that he was so mentally deranged at the time that "he did not know that what he was doing was wrong."

Of course, Douglas Baines knew that it was wrong to seize a girl by the throat and try to shake the truth out of her. He did not deny that he had taken twenty pounds from her purse. So the judge colored his address to the jury with a great deal of moral indignation.

But that was because the judge did not know how and why Baines had been caught — five years after the crime had been committed.

Baines was the son of a prosperous architect, practicing in York. His mother had run away — eloped — when he was two. But his father had filled the double role so successfully that the boy had been barely conscious of his loss. In 1944, he was eighteen and was therefore swept into the army while on his way to a university to seek a degree in engineering. He had no aptitude for soldiering; but

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in France he did well enough to be given a Field promotion from the ranks. He was pleased because his father was so pleased.

After the fighting was over, he was sent to London on escort duty, without leave. His job done, he wrongfully took the next train to York — he had not seen his father for more than a year.

After the first glad minutes of reunion, he frankly explained that he was awarding himself a few days' leave. His father's geniality vanished and with it the affection of nineteen years. He ordered the boy to return to his unit at once — or he would himself call the police. The shock was profound. Hating the world and himself, Douglas Baines collected his civilian clothing, emptied his bank account of some fifty pounds, deserted the army and his home at the same time, and came to London.

A deserter — without the identity card and the ration book which were then in force — was in much the same position as an escaped convict, except that there was no publicity and he was not actively hunted. Meals could be bought in restaurants. But it was impossible to obtain lawful employment.

When he was halfway through the fifty pounds, he met Daisy Harker, a waitress in a cheap "caff." She guessed what he was doing. She stimulated his waning courage, gave him practical advice on how to scratch a living, and fell in love with him — as much as Daisy Harker could fall in love with any man. Daisy was spirited, more than a little motherly, and passably good-looking.

He joined forces with her, adopting her surname, and drifted into the life of a "spiv." He was not exactly a crook, though few of his activities would bear the full light of day. It was a life of street-corner deals, of shady little commissions, of sudden repairs to a car, with no questions asked. He endured it contentedly enough until Daisy bore him a son. Thereafter, his single purpose was to wriggle himself into a legitimate business.

It so happens that the whole of his life for the next four years is compressed and, as it were, photographed in the last half hour of Daisy's life.

It was early evening of a foggy day in November. He clattered down the stairs to the basement flat, in a slum area near Euston Station. The clattering alone was significant, for the years of spivving had given him a catlike walk. He was carrying a neatly wrapped parcel bearing the imprint of a toy shop. He had the air of a man who has won a sweepstake and is warning himself to keep his head.

The house — a tumbledown Victorian survival — was let by the floor. It was damp and drafty, but at least it provided space. The kitchen-living room was like two rooms in one. In the kitchen half was the stove, overhung with a wash line on which underclothes were drying, and a oilcloth-covered table at which were three chairs, the third being a young

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child's high-chair. The sitting room part contained two aged armchairs and a settee in faded plush.

He called to Daisy, received no answer, and promptly forgot her. He sat at the table and with slow enjoyment unwrapped the parcel. From the carton he took a tumbler doll, a garish clown made of tin: it was so weighted that when it was pushed over from any angle, it would noisily wobble back to a standing position. Baines pushed it and giggled happily as it wobbled back.

Daisy came in from the bedroom. She had reached home only a few minutes before himself. She was still wearing a neat outdoor skirt and her best blouse, and carried her purse bag in the crook of her arm. She looked from the toy to the paper in which it had been wrapped.

"Did you *buy* that thing?"

"Paid cash over the counter — and liked it! Bert paid up this morning and a good time will be had by all." He glanced over his shoulder, to make sure the bedroom door was shut — in case the boy should be awake. "Jiffy didn't know it was his birthday last Thursday, unless you told him, so his birthday is tomorrow, see? Take a look at this, will you!" He poked the toy. "You can't help laughing!"

"Kids don't play with toys like that."

"Jiffy will!" He pushed the toy out of reach. "Listen, Daise, I've got a bit of good news."

"You always have got a bit of good news."

"Hark at her!" A laugh rippled up from deep down. "This is different, Daisy. This is a real opening at last!"

"I'm sure it is." She was bitter. "You met a man in a pub who has a gem of an idea and enough dough to get it started. And it's legitimate business — or next door to. And in a month you'll have an office of your own and we'll get a decent place to live in. You'll go on having that bit of good news all your life."

"Say it all!" His eyes were smiling. "Only this time, duckie, you'll be wrong. This man is in a good way of business."

"Did he happen to ask what you've been doing these last few years? . . . Whatcher tell him?"

"I told him I deserted from the army and I'm still on the run." He saw that he had shaken her, and pressed on, "Do you know what he said Daise? He said, 'I got browned off on my last leave, too. But I was luckier than you,' he says. 'My missis — she was the girl friend then — she nagged me into going back to duty. And now I've got a repair garage and I'm getting another and I need a manager.' Meaning *me!*"

Daisy was silenced but not convinced. His tales were never downright lies, though nothing ever came of them.

"Think of it, Daisy! It means an end of all this. It means I'll be able to look Jiffy in the face when he's old enough to ask questions." She remained unimpressed. "We're going to celebrate. There's a half bottle of

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mother's ruin in my coat. And put some grub up. I'm starving."

He got up, moved towards the bedroom door.

"What're you going in there for?" she asked.

"It's all right — I won't wake him."

"Jiffy isn't in his cot," she said sullenly.

"Cor! You oughtn't to 've left him at Ma Dawson's as late as this." A second later his good temper returned. "I'll go and fetch him while you get the grub."

"Stay where you are, Douglas!" The tone of her voice stopped him short. "Jiffy's gone. I've fixed it for him to be adopted. I took him along to his new mum and dad this afternoon."

"Say that again!" He was trying to force time backwards to the moment before she had said it.

"I made up my mind months ago. A gentleman friend who's a lawyer told me I have a perfect right and you can't do anything. And he's seen to the law part of it for me. Better get used to it, Doug. You'll never see that kid again."

He was standing where he had stopped on his way to fetch Jiffy. He was not even looking at her.

"They're decent people, if you want to know — real gentry, with money of their own. They'll give him a proper chance. . . . First and last he's my child, don't forget it. . . . I'll own up you'd have done your best for him, but your best wouldn't have been any good. Done him harm, more like . . . If I've never been a good mother to him before, I've been one today."

Slowly the essential question framed itself.

"How much did they give you?"

"Twenty quid, though I don't see what that's got to do with it. I suppose you want your cut. You do need a couple of new shirts."

"We're going to pay it back. Tonight. Before they have time to get fond of Jiffy."

She stormed at him, arguing that the adopting parents would send for the police if he made a scene and the police would ask unanswerable questions. Baines was thinking of something else.

"Jiffy will be frightened in a strange place. Betcher he's howling for me this very minute. I'm going to get him."

That loosed in her the frustration of years and the submerged hatred.

"You, slopping over that kid!" she shrilled "Look at him in the face when he's old enough and — kiss-me-foot! Will you tell him you let his mother keep you when you daren't go to the hospital because of being a deserter? And you pretending to believe I got all that cash-on-the-nail as a waitress in a caff! You'd got eyes, same as other men. You could see where that money came from."

"It doesn't matter what I've been. Everything's different now." His own words came as a revelation to him. Life was beckoning to him and

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Jiffy. "Put your hat and coat on and take me along to those people — and I'll marry you as soon as you like. It'd be safe now."

"*You'll* marry *me!* Thank you kindly, Mister Whatever-your-name-is — I don't know because you've never told me. And you can drink that half bottle of gin by yourself because I'm walking out on you tonight!"

"Okay! I'll settle about Jiffy myself. You're out of it and no one will blame you. Give me the address and mind it's the right one."

"So's you can make a nasty smell round his new life before it's even begun! Not me!"

As she passed his chair he caught her wrist and bent it.

"What's the address?"

When she refused, he gripped her round the neck and slowly applied pressure.

"You'll break my neck, you fool!"

She was not frightened enough — not yet. But as the pressure increased, she screamed. The scream was cut off and he felt a click that might have come from her bones. Her weight sagged on to his hands, and he lowered her gently to the floor.

"Daisy . . . Daisy, snap out of it. . . . I'll get you a drink." He knew it would be absurd to get her a drink. But, again, he had to reach back — to the moment before he had killed her. He even took the bottle from his raincoat, but was jerked back to reality by the sound of footsteps — shuffling footsteps which he recognized — coming down to the basement.

The new life had not yet begun — the technique of the old still had its uses. He flung his raincoat over the child's high-chair and moved the chair so that a man standing in the doorway would have no line of vision to the corpse. Then he shouted as if he were still brawling with a living woman.

"You got what was coming to you! And now go and wash your face." Then he opened the door to the elderly tenant of the floor above.

"Why, it's you, Mr. Hendricks! Fact is, I lost my temper and dotted her one. She's washing herself up. P'raps you'd like to see her, so's you can tell Mrs. Hendricks it's all right? . . . Hi, Dais-*ee!* Here's Mr. Hendricks wants to know what it's all about. Come in, Mr. Hendricks, she won't be a minute."

But Mr. Hendricks, as could be anticipated, declined the invitation and shuffled back up the stairs.

Baines was now fully alert. He found the same shabby old suitcase with which he had left his father's house, and began to pack. As he was about to leave he caught sight of Daisy's purse on the floor. He picked it up, sat at the table, and opened it. From the litter inside he drew a wad of currency notes.

Twenty pounds.

He was stuffing the notes in his pocket when his elbow knocked against the tumbler doll and set it wobbling. It clattered on the table

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and inside his head. His sense of time slipped — it was as if the clatter would never stop. He tried to put out his hand to stop it.

The fantasy passed. That twenty pounds had been the price paid for Jiffy. He sprang up and went to the stove. In the act of thrusting the notes inside, he pulled up.

"I must show *some* sense. All right! I'll show some." The notes went into his pocket.

Turning round, he faced the tumbler doll. He decided to destroy it — and an instant later was horrified at his own decision. He put it back in its carton, then made room for it in the suitcase by throwing out a pair of gum boots.

On the following day the total silence in the basement alarmed Mrs. Hendricks, who told the rent collector, who in turn informed the police. They traced the recent movements of "Douglas Harker," including the purchase of the gin — which he had left behind — and the tumbler doll, traced through the wrapping paper. The time of the purchase suggested that he did not know his child had already gone to the foster parents — which might have been the cause of the quarrel. The absence of the toy from the basement suggested that a murderer on the run had encumbered himself with a bulky, mass-produced toy, worth only a few shillings and difficult to resell. Possible but unlikely — and certainly not helpful!

The dragnet went out for Douglas Harker, with police description, and yielded nothing — because Harker, the street-corner commission agent, had, in effect, ceased to exist.

The history of Douglas Baines for the next five years is a commonplace one of steady if unspectacular success. The war restrictions were now gone and a man could move as freely and anonymously as he liked. His own name, being a fairly common one, no longer held danger.

True, the first three months at the garage had taxed his abilities. Encouraged by the faith of his employer, however, he survived and soon took the initiative. The repair service grew and added a sales agency, the trade boom acting as Baines's fairy godmother. He was able to rent a serviced flat in a respectable district.

In appearance he was a tall, well groomed businessman, looking a little older than his thirty years. His personality reverted to type. His outlook, his tastes, and his habits became those which one would have expected from his early upbringing. The years of spivving seemed to have left no traces — with one exception.

We again receive a telling picture of Baines by watching his behavior with a woman — in this case, Joan Mencefield. She was a first-grade secretary who lived in a flat of her own in Chelsea. The attraction had been mutual — perhaps strengthened by the girl's perception that there was a shadow in the man's background.

They were having tea in his flat when he asked her to marry him.

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"Yes, of course I will!" He had been rather solemn and hesitant about it. "In June, if you like," she said. "It will have to be a quiet one — Mother is hard up. You bring two friends and I'll bring two — that sort of wedding. You don't mind, do you? Why, you're not listening!"

"I've been trying to ask you for months. But I felt I had to tell you something about myself, first. I kept putting it off."

"Then don't tell me — I'll tell you instead." She invited his kiss. "My dear, dear man! Your secret writes itself all over your face every time your car is stopped at a crossing by — young school children. Little boys, about seven to nine years old."

"I'd no idea I was giving myself away like that!" He was pleased, because now they could share his secret. "I'm not always thinking about him, only sometimes!"

"I suppose his mother is part of the problem?" she asked.

"Oh, no!" It was as if she had asked a pointless question. "She's dead and out of it."

He had not forgotten that he had killed her. He blamed himself — much as a car driver who had killed another in a road smash might acknowledge to himself a measure of blame. The sense of personal peril had long vanished.

"I want to be told only one thing, Douglas — is the boy alive?"

That shattered his contentment.

"I don't know." It sounded worse when he said it aloud. "Why shouldn't he be alive and happy? With people who are always kind to him? It's just as likely to be that way as — the other."

He suspected that he was telling her about it in the wrong way. He warned himself to speak calmly and clearly.

"He was adopted. His mother fixed it behind my back. When I came home one evening he was gone. Gone for good! I never saw him again. But that's all over — it doesn't affect me now."

"Only sometimes?"

Her sympathy was weakening his grip on himself.

"Five years ago, it was. He was just three. I'd bought him a toy. And when I got home, he wasn't there. I couldn't give him his birthday present. See what I mean? I never saw him play with it."

She could not fail to notice the change in him and censured herself for stirring memories that still disturbed him. Before she could turn the conversation, he added.

"Matter of fact, I have the toy still. Like to see it, Joan?"

"Only if you're quite sure you want to show it to me."

Before she had answered he was unlocking a drawer in the writing table. The carton was crinkled now, but the colors of the clown were as garish as ever. He drew a chair for himself, sat at the table, and gazed at the doll.

Joan watched him with deep concern. She guessed that he had slipped

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into a world of his own. He was smiling now, but not at her. When he broke into speech she observed the change in his voice.

"Take a look at this, will you! You can't help laughing." He thrust with a finger at the clown. "O-ver he goes! . . . Up again and roundabout. Now it's your turn, Jiffy. Knock him over, boy! That's the way."

He was laughing in counterpoint with the clatter of the toy — the timed, mechanical laughter of a self-induced trance in which he was playing with a child.

Without warning he looked up at her.

"That's torn it!" he said quietly. "I didn't know I was as far gone as that, or I would not have asked you to marry me. We'll call it off, Joan."

"You thought I wanted you to say that — but I don't!" She thrust her arm through his and held him close to her. There was a long silence.

"Do you often play with it?"

"No. I can't remember," he faltered. She waited and he added. "Yes. Quite often."

"Let me keep it for you." She sensed his opposition and hurried on. "You know it's bad for you. If you will trust me with it, I'll lock it away. And I promise I'll give it back at once, whenever you ask, day or night."

"Day or night," he echoed. "How could you keep such a promise? You might not be at home. You're going to your mother's next weekend, and you'll not be back until Monday morning."

That told her that it must be now or never.

"Here is the key of my flat — and here's the key of the left-hand drawer of my dressing table. You can keep them — I have duplicates." Before he could speak, she added. "I think it's our only chance, Douglas — if we are ever to have a child of our own."

Her meaning was sufficiently clear. He wanted her very much and would not risk losing her for the sake of a melancholic dream. He put the toy in its carton and handed it to her.

The next time he saw her — which was also the last time — was on the following Monday morning.

He was finishing breakfast when he heard her knock. He got up slowly, puzzled, and opened the door.

She stepped quickly over the threshold, took the latch from his hand, and shut the outer door.

"Douglas! I've let you down, though it wasn't my fault. The toy!"

She had feared some kind of breakdown but he gave so sign of distress.

"I was having breakfast," he said. "There's some tea left. Come along."

She assumed he had not understood. She signed to him not to pour out tea and made a new beginning.

"Bad news! While I was away, sneak-thief burglars got into the flat. They took my nice rug, most of my clothes, all my sheets and blankets, emptied all the drawers on the floor, and left all the windows open so that the rain —"

"That's tough luck!" he broke in.

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"But you are insured, and there need be no loss in the end. I've lots of blankets and that sort of thing which I can lend you."

"Stop, please! I am trying to break it gently. The toy you entrusted to me for safe-keeping is gone."

"No, it isn't." He was standing by the window, looking out. "I have it."

"Do you mean you took it from the flat before the burglary?"

"Yes. There was no sign of a burglary then."

"Oh, Douglas! I don't know whether to be glad or sorry. Less than a week! I did think you meant to make a real effort."

"I did and I do. I feel very bad about this, Joan. I think it was your going away that did it. The feeling didn't start until Saturday morning, when I thought of you getting on the early train. Then it — well, it sort of grew. It was pretty strong on Saturday evening, but I stuck it out. I fought it on Sunday, but after I'd gone to bed I couldn't hold out any longer. So I dressed and drove over to Chelsea."

She was struck with a sudden happy suspicion.

"I can only half believe you. Are you making it all up to save my feelings? Let me see the toy — please, Douglas." When he unlocked the drawer, showed her the doll, and replaced it, she gave up hope of him.

"You despise me, don't you?" he asked.

"Hardly that." His contrition played on her pity. "It's easy for me to feel superior about it, because I've never had the kind of shock you had. Let's talk about it some other time."

She was about to go when there came a knock on the outer door, and she waited for him to answer it. A moment later she recognized the voice of Detective-Sergeant Jarman, who was investigating the burglary.

"Do you want me, Sergeant?" she asked.

"No, Miss. I didn't know you were here."

"Miss Mencefield and I are engaged to be married," said Baines.

"That should tidy it up," grinned Jarman. "It's about your car, Mr. Baines." He quoted the number. "I have a note that it was parked in Graun Street — that's the side street on the east of the flats — at midnight."

"Correct. But it was there for only a few minutes and I think I can clear myself of the burglary. As you know, Miss Mencefield was away —"

"That's all right, Mr. Baines, now that we know the car was not borrowed for the raid. This gang always uses a private car, which they pick up. They always go for a hundred pounds' worth of domestic stuff, and they do two raids a week — small profits and quick returns, you might say. Sorry to have troubled you, sir."

Thus the district police had an amiable exchange with the murderer of Daisy Harker, without causing him a tremor. It would have been

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fantastic to assume that he had been concerned in the burglary. No brilliance of detection could have linked the position of that car, at that time, with the murder — but it was for this sort of thing that the Department of Dead Ends existed.

Scotland Yard was not called in. It was a small case, with no outstanding feature. But the fact that the windows had been left open rated five lines in an evening paper. The paragraph was read by Detective-Inspector Rason.

"Builder Smith!" exclaimed Rason, and promptly set out for the local police station. Some two years previously, in a similar burglary in Plymouth, the porter of the flats had been maimed for life, and his assailant was believed to be an ex-builder who had never been caught. Builder Smith was known to be in the habit of opening all the windows while working, though he generally shut them when he had finished.

The local station gave him all its information, which helped him little but kept up his spirits. The constable who had observed the number of Baines's car had observed nothing else, as he had been "proceeding" along the side street. Rason thought the owner of the car might be more helpful.

Rason had the integrity, but few of the other qualities, of a good detective. But the Department of Dead Ends was greater than its servants and required of them not brilliance but enthusiasm — and a long memory. Rason would lurch along a trail of hopes and guesses, and the success — in this case and in others — was due to the logic inherent in the Department itself.

After surveying the site of the flats, with special reference to the side street, he called on Douglas Baines.

Baines, who had half expected the police would turn up again with supplementary questions, was very genial about it.

"I warn you I've already told all I know," he said as he invited Rason into the sitting-room.

"That's all right, Mr. Baines. I'm working on another angle." Rason liked the look of the flat — nothing showy or antique — good modern stuff — the sort of flat he would have himself if he could afford it. He gave a racy sketch of the life and works of Builder Smith.

"Well, I'd like to help you, Mr. Rason, but I don't see how I can, so let's have a little whiskey."

Rason accepted. He gave instances of the activities of Builder Smith which an intelligent man like Mr. Baines might have observed.

"But the burglars turned up after I'd gone — I was back here a little after twelve thirty."

Rason blinked.

"The local police don't know what time it was done."

"Nor do I," said Baines. "But I can tell you quite positively that the flat had not been burgled when I entered it at about five past twelve."

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"You were *in* that flat!" Rason hesitated. "I know you won't mind my asking this sort of question, Mr. Baines, but how did you get in? I understand Miss Mencefield was away for the weekend."

"I know. I got in with a latchkey."

Rason was not suspicious of anything — he was merely bewildered.

"If you knew the lady wasn't there — I mean, what was the point of going to the flat at that time of night?"

"It isn't that kind of latchkey!" Baines spoke severely. "We're engaged and expect to be married very shortly. We run in and out of each other's flats, to fetch this or leave that. It's fairly common, nowadays."

Rason tried to work it out. Fetch this or leave that. At midnight. When the other person wasn't there. Fairly common?

"It sounds all right, in a way." He drained his glass. "Were you fetching something or leaving something that particular time?"

Baines allowed himself to show irritation.

"Don't think me starchy, old man, but has that anything to do with your — Builder Smith?"

"You'd be surprised, but it has. I'll give you the lowdown." Rason enjoyed expounding police doctrine — which he himself so rarely followed. "We go out on all sorts of cases and ask all sorts of questions of innocent persons. One of the first things that's rubbed into us as recruits is never to pass an answer which we don't understand — no matter what it's about and no matter what kind of person we're talking to."

"I didn't mean to make a mystery of it," said Baines apologetically. "I was going to fetch something. Something very personal, and I hope you won't ask me for details."

"And something mighty urgent that couldn't wait until the lady came home, so you had to go and fetch it at midnight? Something you had to get hold of there and then?"

"True, in a sense. But it's nothing illegal nor indecent — nor even particularly private. It's just something — well, damned ridiculous."

"So when my chief asks me why you went to that flat at midnight I tell him it was for something damned ridiculous?"

Baines's reluctance had nothing to do with the fact that the other man was a detective. The murder of Daisy was not in his present consciousness. Even if it had been, his attitude to the detective would probably have remained the same. It would have been beyond his conception that the tumbler doll could be a clue to the old murder. It had not been left on the scene of the crime. Nor could he guess that the police had ever known he possessed such a doll.

"Fair enough!" Baines felt as if he were about to strip before a hostile crowd. "It's a toy — a child's toy."

Rason did not laugh. He was surprised only that the other had made all that fuss about a toy — if it really was about a toy.

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"Now you've cleared that up, have another drink?" invited Baines, pouring it as he spoke.

"Here's luck, Mr. Baines." Rason set down the glass and added, "Better let me see the toy and then I can cross it off."

Rason meant no more than he said. Nothing could be further from his mind than to connect this respectable man, in his comfortable flat, with the crime committed by a street-corner spiv five years ago. Nor could the toy itself provide a link. It had not been featured in the report. The only mention of it occurred at the end of the inventory, and it had but a couple of lines: *Objects unaccounted for: Tumbler doll bought by Harker circa 5/45; not received by foster parents* — followed by the latter's name and address.

Baines was unlocking the drawer in his writing table. He took out the carton, removed the toy, and placed it on the table.

"There you are. That's the whole mystery."

The appearance of the doll moved Rason to reminiscence only.

"I know those things — my niece had one when she was a nipper." He poked the doll. "Hm! Amusing! Only you'd get tired of it, wouldn't you! What do they call 'em? 'Acrobatic doll' — no, 'Tin Tumbler'?"

"I don't know what they call it." Baines was gazing at the doll. "It's a clever bit of nonsense. A small child would sort of think it's alive and make a pal of it." He began to put it back.

"It's your property and you lent it to Miss Mencefield. So that she could play with it by herself?"

"It isn't quite like that. Anyhow, she will confirm that she was keeping it for me."

Rason had only one more question.

"I take it, then, that you got a strong feeling in the middle of the night that you must have that — that acrobatic doll — to play with?"

"If you like to put it like that," admitted Baines. "I suppose it's a sort of tic in the brain. You'll understand now why I wasn't keen to talk about it."

Baines replaced the toy in the drawer. As the lock clicked Rason exclaimed, "'Tumbler Doll'! That's what they call 'em . . . Tumbler Doll," he repeated. "Reminds me of something . . . a case in our files. About five years ago, it must've been. Let's see, now — how did the tumbler doll come into it?"

That gave Baines his first suspicion of danger. But suspicion was not enough.

"I've got it! A murder job, it was. Name of Harker. A small-time crook."

It had come too quickly for him — Baines knew he had flinched. But Rason did not observe this, because he had not yet connected Baines with the old case.

"Harker had a young child — and he seems to have been fond of it. Chaps like that often do turn out to be good fathers, though you'd hardly believe it. Harker must've thought a lot of his because he bought the tot

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one of those tumbler dolls. When he got home he found his missis had had the kid adopted without telling him. So he broke her neck and hopped it."

Baines relaxed. There was no danger, after all — no more than there had been for every hour of every day for the past five years. His confidence had been strengthened — the police could chat to him about his own crime without the flicker of a suspicion.

Rason was rattling on.

"Funny thing! That tumbler doll wasn't found in the basement, where they lived. Our men never did find it. Vanished. Almost makes one superstitious when you come to think of it."

"I can guess that one," said Baines. "The spiv posted it to the foster parents?"

"No," said Rason. "We checked."

"What sort of people would adopt the child of a spiv?" asked Baines.

"I don't know what they were like — never saw them. We only kept the name and address in case Harker should try to see his child. Which he never has." Rason got up from the armchair which he so deeply approved. "Well, I've taken up a lot of your time, Mr. Baines, and I'll be off."

Rason glanced guiltily at the clock. He had spent half an hour finding out nothing about Builder Smith.

"Have one for the road," suggested Baines.

"No, really, thanks! I'd like to sit here yarning with you, but I've got to make a move."

"Just one more!" Baines poured the whiskey. "You won't do any more detecting tonight, and this is a quick one."

"That's very nice of you. A quick one it is, and I won't sit down again . . . Cheers!"

"That yarn of yours about the spiv's child who was adopted. Five years ago, you said. I think I can put a cap on it. Five years ago a married cousin of mine adopted a boy — took him from surroundings very close to your description. My cousin's name is Gramshaw and he lives at Brighton. I bet that's the name in your files."

Rason gaped at his own face in the wall mirror. What was there in that face which encouraged amateurs to believe they could pull a fast one on him?

He was silent so long that Baines asked, "Well? Am I right?"

"Yes," said Rason.

This time he was watching Baines, and saw the other's jaw drop in sheer astonishment. Rason laughed.

"One of the *other* first things they rub into us as recruits is how to use a trick question and join it up with another." The trick question had given him a new perspective of the man who had to play with a tumbler doll at midnight. "You're better at it than me. 'What sort of people would adopt the child of a spiv?' I fall for it — like the sucker I am — and let you know I know the name and address. But you overdid it with an imaginary 'cousin Gramshaw.' I did *not* answer with another name and address. When I said 'yes,' you nearly had a fit. You *had* to have that address

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same as you have to have that doll to play with — and for exactly the same reason."

Baines took the second shock steadily.

"And are you going to tell that fantastic story to your chief?"

"Catch me!" smiled Rason. "He'd say it was all guesswork — without a jot of evidence. Won't breathe a word to anybody until we've checked on your fingerprints and shown you to old Hendricks and all the others who lived above your basement . . . Cor, you must be fond of that child! Why the hell did you have to insist on that last whiskey when all I wanted was to go home?"

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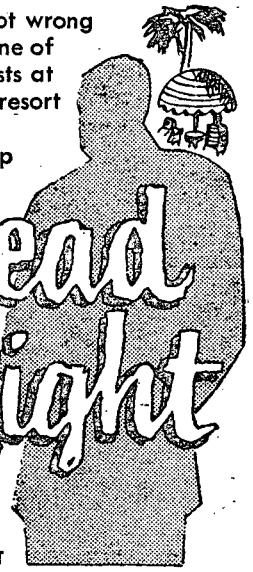

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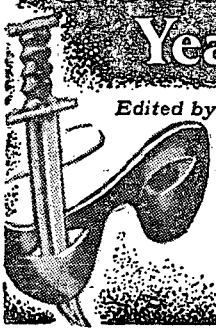

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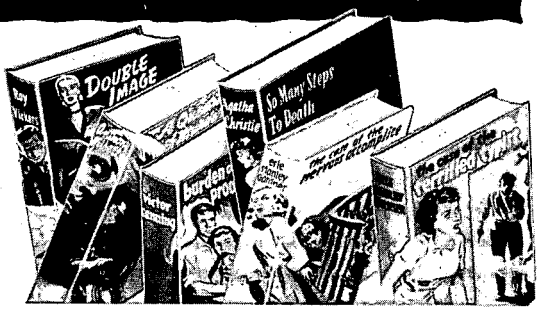

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